

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Scholar Works

Theses

8-2021

Distance Education: Challenges and Opportunities in a Post-Pandemic World. Case of Kosovo

Fiona Shahini
fxs4310@rit.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Shahini, Fiona, "Distance Education: Challenges and Opportunities in a Post-Pandemic World. Case of Kosovo" (2021). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Senior Project is brought to you for free and open access by RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritscholarworks@rit.edu.

**Distance Education: Challenges and Opportunities
in a Post-Pandemic World.
Case of Kosovo**

An Honors Society Project

Fiona Shahini

Advisor

Venera Demukaj

Second Readers

Sara Baxley & Lorraina Pinnell

August, 2021

Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities created by the abrupt shift from classroom to distance learning. This study will try to address the question of “What distance learning presents for the future of education in a post-pandemic world?” More specifically, it aims to uncover the opportunities distance education brings and the challenges that can be resolved or mitigated in the future.

The study focuses on secondary and primary data to uncover and analyze the experience of professors and students of tertiary education with distance learning. Secondary research shows that distance learning provides flexibility, which both students and teachers can enjoy. When combined with different education technologies and tools, distance learning provides a great opportunity for gifted students and students with disabilities. Nonetheless, with the sudden transition to distance learning many challenges have emerged, namely, the main ones being (i) accessibility to technological devices and technical infrastructure; (ii) pedagogical skills and competencies in distance teaching; and (iii) differences in experience based on the field of study and funding of university.

Findings from the primary research show that similar challenges (as those mentioned above) are faced by students and professors in Kosovo as well. Both secondary and primary research supports the hypothesis regarding differences in challenges faced as there are actual patterns specific to public and private universities. In public universities, professors and students face greater challenges due to lack of technical resources and funding; therefore, they are relatively more dissatisfied with distance learning. Similarly, research supports the hypothesis that students and professors of Social Sciences have had a more pleasant experience (with distance education), compared to Natural & Applied Sciences (given their reliance on technological equipment).

Based on the opportunities and challenges identified, this study highlights a set of recommendations that can improve the distance learning experience in a post pandemic era. More specifically, the recommendations are focused on infrastructure, human resources training, networking, and education providers’ support.

Keywords: education; distance; COVID; opportunities; sciences

It is with utmost gratitude and warm regard that I dedicate this study to my beloved parents and brother.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the people without whom the completion of this research project would have not been possible. I cannot express enough appreciation for my capstone Professor Venera Demukaj, who has guided and supported me throughout the research process with no hesitation and complete enthusiasm, motivation and immense knowledge. Additionally, I would like to extend my appreciation to Professor Sara Baxley for the constructive feedback she has provided.

My sincere thanks go to all my honors colleagues and my friends who have advised, supported and motivated me in times of hardship. You have made this experience unforgettable and for that I would be thankful.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my aunt who has not only supported me but helped me contact and reach many survey respondents. Without her contribution this research may have not been completed.

Finally, to my family, my mother, father and brother, I will be eternally grateful for the endless support you have given me. No words can express the gratitude I have for you.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments	4
List of Figures	6
List of Tables	7
List of Abbreviations	7
Literature Review	9
Methodology	15
<i>Secondary Data Collection</i>	16
<i>Primary Data Collection</i>	17
Surveys	17
Semi-structured interview	18
Focus Group Discussion	19
Limitations in Data Collection	19
Results and Analysis	20
Secondary-data research	20
SWOC Analysis	21
<i>Primary Data research</i>	28
(i) Accessibility and technical infrastructure	28
(ii) Competencies and pedagogies on distant education	33
(iii) Curriculum and course content	37
(iv) Analysis of survey results based on field of study	40
(v) Analysis of survey results based on university (public and private)	42
Recommendations	43
(i) Infrastructure: Availability of Technology and Technical Infrastructure	44
Focus on access and equity	44
(ii) People - Technology Literacy and Training	46
Support Students	46
Support faculty	47
Communicate	49
Establish relationships and support groups	51
(iv) Education Providers – Curriculum, Assessment and Policies	51
Develop Curriculum for Online/Remote Environment	51

Design and pilot new methods of assessment	52
Modify University Policies	53
Conclusion	54
References.....	56
Appendix 1: Survey with Professors	63
Albanian Version	63
English Version.....	67
Appendix 2: Survey with Students	72
Albanian Version	72
English Version.....	76
Appendix 3: Consent Forms	78
Semi – Structured Interview Consent Form.....	78
Focus Group Discussion Consent Form.....	79
Appendix 4: Interview Questions	81
Appendix 5: Focus Group Discussion Questions	82

List of Figures

Figure 1: How has COVID -19 affected teaching and learning.....	20
Figure 2: Fall 2020 International School Plans.....	21
Figure 3: How have students engaged in distance learning?	28
Figure 4: What technological equipment professors have available	29
Figure 5: Student's access to technological devices to conduct distance learning.....	29
Figure 6: The main challenges faced by students during distance learning	30
Figure 7: The main challenges faced by professors during distance learning	31
Figure 8: If yes, in what aspects has your experience with distance teaching improved?.....	33
Figure 9: How would professors describe their experience with distance learning?.....	34
Figure 10: Professors overall evaluation of distance learning	34
Figure 12: In you experience, distance learning is	35
Figure 11: Students overall evaluation of distance learning	34
Figure 13: How was your workload changed when shifting to distance learning	35
Figure 14: From 1-5, express your stand for these statements	36
Figure 15: Benefits students have enjoyed with distance learning	37
Figure 16: If distance learning is still available, would you like to take online / distance classes even when universities are fully reopened?	38
Figure 17:What professors would like as support through distance learning	39

Figure 18: Field of Study where respondents conduct learning	40
Figure 19: Field of Study where respondents provide teaching (categorized based on Social or Natural Sciences)	40
Figure 20: Student responses based on field of study	41
Figure 21: Field of Study where respondents provide teaching	41
Figure 22: Survey respondents based on university where they teach	42
Figure 23: Survey respondents based on university where they learn (Students)	42

List of Tables

Table 1: Impact on teaching and learning by region.....	24
---	----

List of Abbreviations

COVID-19 – Coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2

HEI – Higher Education Institution (tertiary education)

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

LMS – Learning Management System

MoE – Ministry of Education

STEM – Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics

SWOC – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges

Statement of the Problem

With the outbreak of COVID -19 the world is experiencing great uncertainty as each individual has been affected both in their professional and personal life. As lockdowns and isolation rules continue to be imposed, society has turned to remote/online communication and interaction as a way to adapt to this new situation. While such methods have been previously used in some industries, the current implementation in certain sectors and institutions has brought great challenges to the surface among which are also education institutions. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres explains, the pandemic has caused a severe disruption in the global education systems which may stretch for several years, and thus, may tear down decades of progress (UNESCO 2020). In pre-COVID era many educational establishments had limited offerings available in regards to distant learning; both in terms of content and on-line courses. According to World Bank's education sector manager, Patrinos, and education specialist, Shmis (2020), before COVID -19, only 20% of countries in Europe and Central Asia had a number of schools in which digital resources were utilized for teaching. Nonetheless, COVID-19 has changed this and has forced almost all education providers to start thinking about how to transition completely, or move at least partially, from in-person learning to distance learning. This transition is a process (rather than an event) with many challenges and difficulties having been identified globally even in most technology advanced countries. Technical infrastructure and accessibility, competencies on distant education and field of study are only some of the challenges currently faced by the education sector, or more specifically by higher educational institutions, leaving them struggling in between distance and in – person learning (Marinoni, 2020). While distance learning is an ongoing experiment globally, the research and data gathered have brought sufficient sources from which we can evaluate, reform and adopt distance learning in a post-pandemic world. Medical experts are warning us that pandemics will be more frequent in the future due to globalization and human behaviour impact on planet Earth (Dalton 2020). Therefore, it is logical to assume that distance learning may be widely utilized in the future as well. Hence, this study seeks to analyze the current trends of online learning in the education sector during the “COVID-era” and identify major challenges and obstacles that are being faced. The final objective of this study is to build a country profile for Kosovo to analyze how higher education institutions are dealing with distance

education, examine the extent to which these methods can make up for in person learning, and provide long – lasting and meaningful recommendations for key challenges faced in a post pandemic world.

Literature Review

The notion of distance learning has been around for three centuries and has evolved quite rapidly throughout time; therefore, the initial phases of research are focused on the definition of distance learning, its evolution and its current state. The introduction of such form of learning has brought up different schools of thoughts, namely, those who see distance learning as an opportunity for high - quality education in the future, and those who believe no method of learning is as enriched as that of traditional in-class education. Such views are worth mentioning as it provides insight into the challenges and opportunities this method of education brings. As this present research will initially focus on the global approach to distance learning, it will further center around the case of Kosovo by analyzing its education system before COVID-19 and its shift to a remote/online experience.

Distance learning can be defined as a process of acquiring knowledge “in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instructions and the use of various technologies [or other tools] to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication” (Distance Learning n.d). Such broad notion includes various methods of distance education which have been utilized since the 18th century (Kentnor, 2015). Initially, distance learning consisted of mainly correspondence education for students who lacked access to traditional education institutions. Through postal services, teachers have mailed lessons and exercises to students and then received them back for feedback and evaluation (Kentnor 2015). By the early 1900’s, with the invention of radio devices and television, education providers then moved to communication technologies as a method through which they delivered lessons. Such method is utilized even to this day, mainly with primary schools. That is, with COVID-19 leading to school closures, primary schools used television broadcasting as a mode of delivering lessons (“Mësimi online në distancë, ministria me grup të ekspertëve për vlerësimin e nxënësve” 2020). By 1991, with the introduction of the World Wide Web, students were presented with online

education programs through the Internet (Kentnor 2015). In other words, distance learning focused on utilizing the internet and technological devices to provide learning.

As stated by Lowenthal et al. (2017), “The rise of the Internet and specifically online learning has only complicated [the definition of distance learning] by introducing countless variations and blended forms of distance education”. Today, this notion includes both asynchronous and synchronous distance learning, which are both considered distant methods of education. Nonetheless, as they differ in their implementation (execution), they will be reviewed separately in this study.

Asynchronous distance learning, is the method of teaching/learning in which education is not received in-person, nor in real time, but rather through different mediums of communication at different points in time. With this form of education, learning is received on a more individual basis rather than through group live sessions (Woodcock 2020). As mentioned earlier, asynchronous learning includes correspondence models where mail and different communication channels (radio, television) are utilized. However, as Kentnor (2015) explains, with the move to virtual platforms, today asynchronous learning focuses on utilizing digital resources such as online platforms, websites or other online learning management systems to provide instructions, assignments, evaluation and communication between professors and students. In this way, students learn and complete assignments in a time that suits them (before the settled deadlines) while the interaction between the lecturer and the learner is usually done through written content, online discussions, pre-recorded audio or video lessons and e-mail correspondence (Woodcock 2020).

Similar to asynchronous learning, synchronous learning is also a method of education which utilizes technological devices and the internet. However, different from the former method, synchronous learning also includes scheduled real - time classes/ lectures which are held online using video conferencing platforms (such as *Zoom*, *Microsoft Teams*, *Google Meet* etc.) or television broadcasting. Such method of learning “refers to a type of learning where the learning group – comprised of both the teacher and the students – interacts at the same time, albeit from different geographical locations” (Woodcock 2020). In other words, lectures are held in real time with students but in virtual classrooms rather than physical ones (Online vs. Remote Learning 2020).

Conversely, in - person learning, which is identified as the traditional learning method, occurs in a classroom setting and is utilized across the world. As the name itself explains this method of education requires the physical presence of both the student and professor at a certain time and place. Although today, digital resources are utilized even in this method of learning, they come as support and to increase the effectiveness of teaching while the main communication and interaction remains physically in class (in - person).

With social distancing rules still in place and the challenges of remote learning methods, many higher education institutions have shifted to blended learning models. Also known as hybrid or mixed-mode learning, this method refers to the combination of both in-person and remote (synchronous and asynchronous) education. The implementation and design of this method may vary from one educational institution to another (Blended Learning Definition 2013). With the outbreak of COVID-19, universities have explored many ways of using blended learning models to provide their services. In many educational institutions, hybrid learning has been used in support of in - person learning, meaning they have continued classes in-person (with social distancing rules in place) while using online platforms for assignments and tests. Or vice versa, lectures have been held through video conferencing platforms while exams have been conducted in-person. The majority of universities have used blended models by combining traditional in-person learning with remote (asynchronous and synchronous) learning. That is, a class has been divided into two groups with one group being delivered lectures in-person while the other group, simultaneously, receives the lecture/content remotely through video conferencing platforms (RITK Academic Affairs, personal communication, 2020).

With the introduction of these several different methods of education, different schools of thought have been developed and supported by students and professors. For many, distance education is believed to have provided opportunities that were not possible with traditional learning, particularly for students with disabilities or those who live in rural areas (Hassenburg 2009). That is, such methods have reduced the importance of geographic location by being able to attend lectures without being physically present, thus, providing opportunities for people that have been disadvantaged with traditional in-class learning. Teacher shortage, curriculum imbalances (lack of course options) and tight budgets are challenges faced in rural areas that are less prevalent with distance methods of learning (Dachos 2020). In other words, remote learning allows a better

chance for equal and high-quality education for students across different areas. The benefits of distance learning are also enjoyed by students with disabilities. Whether students have visual, hearing impairment or physical disabilities, distance learning provides various tools such as braille keyboards, voice – to – text software’s and recorded lectures that allow them to have opportunities that may have been limited with other methods of learning (Barden 2017). Proponents of distance education have also argued that the flexibility presented has allowed students to set their own pace of studying. Such flexibility has also contributed to better and more effective participation in discussion forums in class. As Hawkes (2001) states, with distance learning, students have more time to provide well thought-out and reflective responses rather than in-class where they have little to no time to provide an answer. The possibility to save time and money when attending online/remote lectures has also been a reason which has shifted student’s preferences toward distance learning (Bijeesh n.d).

Nonetheless, such arguments in favor of distance education have been countered by many supporters of traditional learning. The flexibility presented in distance education may not be as beneficial as one might say given that such benefits may be partly influenced by the individual’s learning style. That is, a student who lacks self-motivation and time - management skills might find distance learning less effective compared to traditional learning (Tierney 2020). Such effects then, combined with distractions in your learning environment, lead to a decline in the quality of learning provided with this method of education (Hassenburg 2009). Even for professors, distance education has provided a decline in their teaching flexibility as they are no longer able to rely “upon verbal cues and the spontaneity of classroom discussion to serve as a catalyst for interaction” (O’Quinn & Corry 2002). Critics have argued that geography and limited infrastructure may continue to be an obstacle even for distance education, as lack of or poor internet connection in certain geographical locations may hinder the potential of distance learning (Tierney 2020). In addition, with the evolution of distance education, access to technology has become essential in being able to participate in distance learning, thus, creating hidden costs (of purchasing technological equipment) which may not be initially considered (Bijeesh n.d).

Although the debate in regards to distance learning and traditional learning is on-going, it can be concluded that one’s thoughts and views regarding education cannot simply fall into those in support and against distance education as each person’s view depends on their experience and

personal preferences regarding learning styles. Nonetheless, such perceptions give insight into what characteristics of distance learning are preferred by students or professors and which of them are obstacles that require further improvement.

Before the invention of the internet, distance education was utilized only by necessity when people could not be physically present. However, with access to internet and technological devices better opportunities were presented for methods of distant learning. Nonetheless, the massive adoption and conversion of in-classroom experience to online platforms - as predicted by many technology enthusiasts - never happened. Only a small number of European and Central Asian countries had capabilities for providing remote education (Patrinos & Shmis 2020). Despite offerings for remote and distant learning from various education providers, “in-class” learning remained the preferred mode of education. Even the United States, a country with better experience and availability of e - learning, has not experienced significant growth in distance education. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning in the United States had only modest growth in terms of enrollment of online courses from 33% to 35% during 2017 – 2018 (“The Evolution of Distance Education in 2020” 2020). With the outbreak of COVID-19 and the closure of schools, such percentages have increased significantly, with notions of online, remote and distance education being used now more than ever before.

Compared to European Union countries, the experience with distance learning in the Western Balkans is quite new. The major contribution of Western Balkan countries in terms of distance learning has been the development of learning management systems (LMS) which are software applications designed to administer, document, manage and report any educational courses or training programs (Chaushi et al. 2015). As research conducted in Western Balkan universities shows, around 70% of them have developed and utilized LMS to aid in-class learning (Chaushi et al 2015). Although digital resources were being utilized, there was not much attention put to implementing /adapting distance learning. In 2018, with the establishment of *EdTech Center Western Balkans*, in Belgrade (Serbia), countries in Western Balkans were presented with the opportunity to expand their experience with utilizing digital resources for teaching. The aim with this organization was to present teachers and professors with training opportunities regarding technological tools that could improve the quality of education in Western Balkans. With the outbreak of COVID - 19, *EdTech Center Western Balkans* organized "Digital Education 2020" in

cooperation with other education-based institutions. This online event provided opportunities for sharing information, queries and learning how to utilize technological resources for providing distance education. As the project manager at *EdTech Center* Jelena Dragaš explains, “About 6,600 participants from Serbia and neighbouring countries applied, and we issued 4,500 participation certificates for this accredited event. We had over 18,000 log-ins during the two days, moderated about 50 lectures and enabled participation for 70 lecturers” (Velickovic 2020). That is, with such events, countries in Western Balkans are widening their choices on methods/forms of delivering education.

As with other Western Balkan countries, Kosovo’s experience with distance education is also quite new as its higher education system has been built upon the basis of traditional (in-class) learning both in public and private universities. According to the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, the higher education system in Kosovo consists of 9 public and 22 private HEIs (“Institucionet e Arsimit të Lartë në Kosovë.” n.d.). These educational institutions offer studies for Bachelor, Master and PhD where students can choose between regular studying arrangements (full-time) or correspondence learning/education (part-time) (“Higher Education—State Portal of the Republic of Kosovo.” n.d.). Kosovo’s experience with distance learning has been mostly through correspondence education. With this method of learning, professors provide the instructions and learning material to students through e-mail or any LMS while students study on their own (they are not required to attend regular lectures) and only attend exams. The main technological tools utilized in the education sector are LMSs such as *SEMS*, *MOODLE*, and *myCourses* adapted by each HIE for their respective students.

As for other methods of distance education (online learning), Travers (2020) explains that, “In 2014, the Kosovo Government allocated five million euros to develop an online teaching platform and train teachers how to use it. However, since the training was completed in 2016, the platform has been left empty of content and unused”. In other words, although some planning and training was done for online learning, such efforts did not move further, thus, resulting in lack of distance (online) learning opportunities for students.

Although distance education has not been prevalent in Kosovo’s education system until now, the outbreak of COVID - 19 has brought a drastic shift away from in-class learning and towards distance learning methods. With the decision of the Kosovo Government to close schools

in March 2020, education institutions transitioned to distance methods of learning. As deputy Minister of Education in Kosovo, Rexhaj explained, primary schools provided learning on national television broadcasts and by video conferencing and other online platforms for high school students. Lessons were delivered in Albanian, Turkish, Bosnian and Serbian (“Mësimi online në distancë, ministria me grup të ekspertëve për vlerësimin e nxënësve“ 2020). Similarly, HEIs also utilized their respective LMS and video conferencing platforms to conduct learning for the spring semester. With the difficulties faced with distance learning, the Kosovo government decided to allow primary and high school students to transition back to in-classroom learning with safety measures in place (2020 Krasniqi – Veseli). As for HEIs, the government allowed universities to independently decide their method of learning based on their resources and social distancing rules. Based on such information, the majority of HEIs utilized hybrid/blended methods of learning (“Kosova fillon vitin shkollor në tetor, mësimi i kombinuar” 2020). However, later on, with the increased number of COVID cases, the government instructed all HEIs to move their teaching online while exams are held in-person (with social distancing measures in place) (“Qeveria e Kosovës miraton vendimin për masat e veçanta për mbrojtjen nga COVID-19” 2020) .

The sudden shift of the education sector to distance learning has introduced new tools/approaches to learning and with the implementation of these new methods, new challenges and opportunities have surfaced as well. This transition has paved the way for more exploration and discussions regarding the availability of and accessibility to distance methods of learning. Such aspects have been explored further through primary and secondary data research.

Methodology

With the aim to analyze the experience with distance learning, both from the perspective of professors and the perspective of students, this study will offer a mix of qualitative and quantitative research conducted through primary and secondary data collection. More specifically, the study focuses on existing literature, online surveys, semi – structured interview and focus group discussion as means through which the necessary information is obtained.

Secondary Data Collection

The major shift from in-person learning to remote and online learning is one of the most recent transitions of the worldwide education sector, therefore, there has been an extensive amount of research done to analyze and evaluate these new methods of learning. The first part of the study focuses on analyzing the global experience with distance education, and is based on existing literature. The qualitative secondary data has been gathered to analyze the process of adapting distance modes of teaching and to evaluate the effects of such shifts for the current and future education sector. Additionally, the qualitative secondary data has also been utilized later in the study to present any recommendations from experts that can be useful in easing the transition and improving the experience with distance learning in a post – pandemic world.

The main quantitative secondary research upon which the global experience of HEIs with distance education has been presented is the findings of the reports by *International Association of Universities*; namely, the “Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education around the World” and “Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education”. The statistics and graphs gathered from these reports have provided insight into the experience of HEIs with incorporating educational technology to facilitate learning during a worldwide pandemic. Furthermore, other reports such as that of *The College Crisis Initiative (C2i)* have also been utilized to present the changes and shifts HIEs have undergone to ensure the most effective way of providing education under the current circumstances.

With the aim of the study to uncover the opportunities and challenges of distance learning, secondary research has focused on a SWOC analysis conducted by Dhawan (2020). The challenges identified through this analysis have then been grouped just as on the study of *International Association of Universities* and then have been taken into consideration in the recommendation section. As for the opportunities that distance education provides, the study of Gilbert (2015) on “Online Learning Revealing the Benefits and Challenges” has been referenced in this study.

For the case of Kosovo and its shift to distance learning, there is not much extensive research done for this topic, thus, the main secondary data utilized has been that of *Higher Education—State Portal of the Republic of Kosovo* and others articles that provide insight into the education system in Kosovo and the shift to distance learning during a worldwide pandemic.

Lastly, to understand whether the distance learning experience differs between various disciplines and universities, the study of Atubi (2020) on “Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and the upsurge of online learning: Prospects for social studies in Nigeria” and that of Lawrence (2020) on “Remote Teaching Survey Results, Remote Teaching Tools” have been utilized.

Primary Data Collection

Since the shift to online/remote learning, whether partially or fully, in Kosovo is a new experience, there is not much research done specifically on this topic. Therefore, the examination and evaluation of the case of Kosovo on transitioning to distance methods of education has been done through collection of the primary data. The qualitative and quantitative data were gathered through two online surveys; one semi - structured interview; and one focus group discussion.

Surveys

Given that the aim of this study is to understand the distance learning experience of both professors and students, two online surveys have been designed, (i) one for professors who teach at HEIs and (ii) the other for students of tertiary education. The purpose of conducting these surveys has been not only to uncover the experience of professors and students with distance learning but to also identify and reveal any patterns or differences in experience between professors and students of different disciplines (since different fields of study differ on their reliance on technical resources). In addition, given the differences in school and student resources, the study has also focused on analyzing the experience of both public and private HEIs and understand whether their impressions on distance learning differ. Since the survey is aimed at Kosovo students and professors, the questionnaire has been prepared in Albanian and was distributed online through social media and electronic mail. The consent, information and any explanation of how the data will be used was attached to each survey at the introduction section. In addition, to encourage more sincere responses, surveys were submitted anonymously. (See Appendix 1 and 2 for a copy of the survey questions).

Since the online survey aims to analyze the experience with distance education and recognize any differences between disciplines and universities, the identification of participants to be included in this study (for both surveys) has been done through stratified sampling as HIEs have

been grouped based on their funding (private and public) and disciplines (categorized into Humanities & Social Sciences or Natural Sciences – STEM). More specifically, public universities are those HEIs that are funded by the state government while private universities are those funded through private funding and student tuition fees (Garnett n.d.). As for the fields of study, academic disciplines have been categorized into Natural & Applied Sciences (Computer Science, Engineering, Mathematics, Medicine, Chemistry, Physics and Geology, amongst others) or Humanities & Social Sciences (Law, Education, Political Science, Economics, Business Management, Anthropology, Language, Literature, Art etc.). Thus, based on such categorization the distribution of online surveys has been done to ensure that responses from different universities and different disciplines were gathered.

Survey with Professors

The survey designed for professors includes 21 questions presented in different forms such as multiple choice, summative/rating scale, checkbox and open ended. From the distribution of the survey a total of 75 responses were collected, however, given that 11 of them were only partial responses (the survey was not fully completed) only 64 responses have been included in this study.

Survey with students

To uncover and analyze the experience of students, a different survey was designed which included 18 questions concerned with students' experience, positive aspects and the challenges faced with distance learning. The survey was distributed to students from different disciplines and different universities resulting in a total of 251 responses.

Semi-structured interview

The primary research included one semi - structured interview. With regards to this part of research, the interviewee (identified as Interviewee A throughout the study) was selected through intermediaries. The interview was conducted with an education policy maker who has witnessed the transition to distance learning during a pandemic in Albania and Kosovo. With this type of primary data, the aim was to understand the process of implementing and adapting different methods of distance education while also providing insights into the best process for utilizing educational technology so that methods of distance learning become an integral part of the education sector in the future. (See Appendix 4 for a copy of the interview questions).

Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion was conducted to further explore the answers received from the survey. The questions and discussion were focused on understanding why and how students perceived distance learning. The discussion was done with six undergraduate students from different universities and different fields of study. All participants have experienced the shift to distance learning due to COVID – 19 and thus, have developed an experience and idea regarding these methods of learning. The discussion lasted around one hour and a half and it was audio recorded. (See Appendix 5 for a copy of the focus group discussion questions)

Participant A was a first-year student pursuing a Bachelor Degree in Economics in a public university.

Participant B was a second-year student enrolled in a public university in the field of Computer Science.

Participant C was a fourth – year student pursuing a Bachelor Degree in Medicine at a private university.

Participant D was a first – year student pursuing a Degree in Business & Management at a private university.

Participant E was a third – year student in the field of Journalism at a public university.

Participant F was a first – year student pursuing a Bachelor Degree in Medicine at a public university.

Limitations in Data Collection

The limitations of the research conducted come mainly in terms of sampling size and sampling methods. In terms of size, the sample of professors includes only 64 participants, therefore, this sample may represent only a small percentage of the total population. Furthermore, as for the sampling method, convenient rather than random sampling has been used given that the survey was distributed online and the interview was conducted using online video conferencing tools (due to government imposed social distancing rules). Nonetheless, given that the surveys have been quite detailed, the responses collected have been very insightful in regards to the distance education experience of HEIs in Kosovo. The data uncovered many challenges or opportunities to be considered for improving distance education in a post - pandemic world.

Lastly, the results and conclusions drawn from this study may serve as a foundation for further research on the topic of distance education in Kosovo.

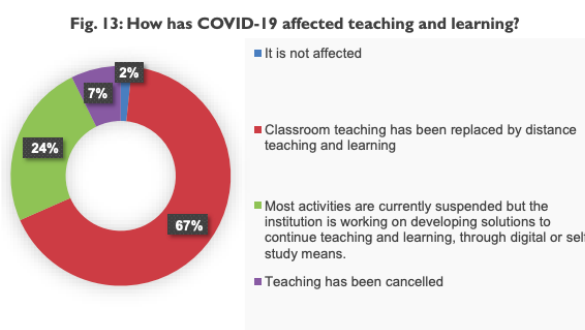
Results and Analysis

Secondary-data research

The research conducted and the experiences of students and education providers have brought sufficient sources from which we can examine methods of distance learning in a post-pandemic world. Just as with any other method of education, distance learning has provided many challenges and opportunities. As each country has created their own teams, plans and projects on utilizing digital methods of teaching, their results have been different from one another providing a set of examples and cases upon which we can evaluate which approaches have been successful and which have not. As mentioned in the methodology section, the secondary research is focused on a global analysis upon which we identify the challenges and opportunities presented; thus, giving us insight into a better and improved approach for distance learning. The closure of education institutions in March 2020 due to COVID -19 led to a drastic shift to online and remote methods of learning (Gallgaher and Palmer 2020). As the survey report by Marinoni et al. (2020) shows, with the outbreak of COVID -19, 67% of HIEs (out of 424 who responded to the survey) transitioned from in - classroom to distance learning, while the other 24% suspended their education services as they worked in

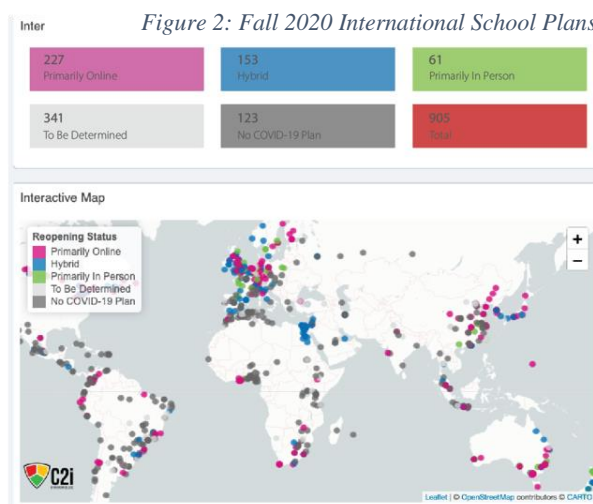
developing solutions for distance learning (Fig. 1). At this time, these methods of education were still an ongoing experiment globally, thus, many challenges and obstacles of distance learning emerged. To ensure that education institutions do not risk the health of their staff and students, the spring semester 2020 was completed through distance learning with all the challenges and strengths it presented. Furthermore, understanding the challenges faced with the sudden shift to complete distance learning, HIEs then developed plans for fall semester using blended methods of learning with the hope that traditional

Figure 1: How has COVID -19 affected teaching and learning



Source: (Marinoni et al. 2020)

in-classroom learning remains the main component. As the *The College Crisis Initiative* (C2i) presented in their report, out of 2958 HIEs (all over the world), 44% had distance methods of learning as their main way of providing education while 27% were focused primarily on in - person learning (C2i Dashboard. n.d). In regards to international universities (905 included in the report), 38% had no COVID plan in place for fall semester while 49% had some form of hybrid model incorporated into their fall semester plans (Fig. 2)(C2i Dashboard. n.d). Despite the planning, with COVID cases increasing around the world, the plans of HIEs changed as 96% of them have already transitioned or have announced their shift to online/remote learning for fall semester 2021 (C2i Dashboard. n.d).



Source:(C2i Dashboard. n.d).

SWOC Analysis

As mentioned in the literature review and the report by *The College Crisis Initiative* (C2i), HEIs have utilized different innovative solutions in which distance education has been the main component. Thus, shifting from one method of learning to another in such a short period of time has provided opportunity for a SWOC analysis, the aim of which is to uncover the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges that distance learning brings. Based upon this analysis, this study can then provide recommendations for the particular challenges and opportunities faced by HIEs in general and, more specifically, in Kosovo.

Strengths

The possibility to continue learning and teaching during a worldwide pandemic has brought to light the strengths of distance education. Methods of remote learning have rescued the education sector during times of natural disasters. Such cases have shown that one of the greatest strengths that distance learning has is that of time and location flexibility (Dhawan 2020). As mentioned by Dhawan (2020), throughout the last decade, there have been several natural disasters which have greatly affected teaching and learning and for which distance education has brought resilient

solutions to continue learning. That is, in terms of hardship, distance learning has not only presented the opportunity to continue education but has encouraged the development of new innovative solutions regarding education that can further improve the learning experience. As it is apparent, this method of education can enhance problem-solving skills, critical thinking abilities, and adaptability among the students (Dhawan 2020). Nonetheless, such innovative solutions have been hampered by difficulties and weaknesses that these methods of education face.

Weaknesses

The weakness that may have made distance education less favorable for students and education providers has been mainly the lack of direct communication - a crucial element upon which the majority of professors depend to transmit their knowledge during teaching (Dhawan 2020). Such weakness has been amplified even more at current times of uncertainty where students have shown great concern regarding their academic performance (Lowman 2020). Combined with the lack of social interaction, students have expressed a decrease in motivation by 28 percentage points (Lowman 2020). In addition, another weakness of distance education may be that it does not meet all student's learning preferences; some may flourish with distance education while others not so much (Gaebel 2020). As each learner differs in their capabilities and confidence in terms of distance learning, many are left feeling confused, stressed and many times even leading to non-studious behavior (Dhawan 2020). Such behavior has been recognized even from previous studies where Matuga (2009) has identified self-regulation and motivation as critical characteristics upon which the effectiveness and academic success with distance education relies. This is, because distance education is characterized by flexibility, it requires more independent work from students, thus, lack of time management, self-regulation and motivation may lead to challenges when learning remotely.

Opportunities

Despite its weaknesses, distance learning also provides opportunities which must be explored to uncover the full potential of these methods of education. These opportunities stand for gifted students and those with disabilities who suffer from limitations in learning due to discrimination and cultural barriers (Gilbert 2015; National Association for Gifted Children n.d.). In other words, the flexibility and innovativeness presented by distance learning allows gifted students to express their full potential, which is something that traditional classroom learning may

not provide due to its more rigid curriculums. This is especially true given that gifted students are characterized with being independent and responsible in terms of their own education (Thomson, 2010). In addition, online and remote learning has presented an opportunity for students with disabilities who cannot attend traditional in-classroom courses. According to Gilbert (2015), 11% of undergraduate learners have reported some type of disability, thus, for such students, distance education may be the best alternative to conduct their learning. Such potential learners include people with an illness or injury, dropouts, single parents, or foreign students (Chaney, 2001). Even for professors and education providers, distance methods of teaching present a variety of tools with which professors can create and curate content in the most effective way for their courses. These innovative solutions can be in terms of learning, certifications, assessment and degrees available (Dhawan 2020). As (Dhawan 2020) states, distance learning and the current situation provides an opportunity for new pedagogical approaches (termed as *Panicgogy*) during uncertain times by focusing on understanding student practicalities and limitations.

Challenges

Nonetheless, the innovative solutions presented with remote and online methods of learning may be hindered by certain challenges faced when utilizing such methods. Although the challenges with distance education have been prevalent before, the wide usage of distance learning in the last few months has magnified the challenges and issues faced (Gaebel 2020). As Marinoni et. al (2020) stated, the main challenges that impact the quality and effectiveness of distance learning can be represented by categories, namely, (i) accessibility and technical infrastructure, (ii) competencies and pedagogies on distant education and (iii) field of study.

(i) Accessibility to technological devices and technical infrastructure

As the world moves toward a digitalized era, technological devices and technical infrastructure have become crucial components of distance education whether in online, blended models or even in-class learning. According to Marinoni et al. (2020), the wide implementation of distance learning has increased the inequalities in education opportunities as not all students have access to technological devices or internet, thus, placing many students (from low income households) at a disadvantage. With the sudden transition to distance learning, education policy makers were concerned with whether they would be able to provide quality education to all students, in all levels of education, in every home (Interview 2021). Access to digital devices is quite sensitive especially

when it comes to rural areas or developing countries where technical infrastructure is quite poor if present at all. This is apparent in Africa where only 29% of HEIs were able to move to distance education compared to Europe where 85% of HEIs had the infrastructure to shift to online/remote learning (Table 1). The other 67% suspended their learning until they could find other solutions to education. Another study

Table 1: Impact on teaching and learning by region

	Not affected	Classroom teaching replaced by distance teaching and learning	Teaching suspended but the institutions is developing solutions	Teaching cancelled
Africa	3 %	29 %	43 %	24 %
Americas	3 %	72 %	22 %	3 %
Asia & Pacific	1 %	60 %	36 %	3 %
Europe	Almost zero	85 %	12 %	3 %

Source: (Marinoni et al. 2020)

shows that around 82% - 89% of students in sub-Saharan Africa lack access to computers and Internet at home

(UNESCO 2020). The inequality in terms of digital devices is apparent even within countries, between rural and urban areas. As Tierney (n.d.) explains, technology may hinder or help distance education, in the case of technical infrastructure it has served as a roadblock as many rural areas may have slow or no internet at all. According to Wang, “technology installation has not progressed in an even manner spatially, and many rural areas find themselves still at a disadvantage in terms of access to and the cost of advanced tools and services” (2013). Such claim has been reiterated by UNICEF Chief of Education, Robert Jenkins, who explains that access to technology is quite unequal among students, and with distance learning, this issue further deepens the inequality in education (“Unequal access to remote schooling amid COVID-19 threatens to deepen global learning crisis” 2020). Unequal access to digital devices has led to uneven distribution of distance education; during COVID-19, around 1 out of 8 students in rural areas and 1 out of 20 urban students did not participate in distance learning at all (Li et al 2020). In other words, with lack of digital resources and ability to provide distance education, students are now falling behind in their studies (Li et al 2020).

Even those that have access to any type of technological devices may still face difficulties in terms of the type of devices utilized and the study space they have available. A study by Li et al. (2020), regarding distance learning during COVID-19 found that over 67% of students surveyed use smartphones (rather than other gadgets with larger screens, such as tablets or laptops) to conduct their distance learning. Such data may indicate a potential issue as research has shown that smaller screens may hinder or impact the effectiveness of distance learning (Kim & Kim,

2012). Although today, online platforms are designed for smartphones and thus, attending classes may be feasible, Kumar and Mittal (2020) explain that using smartphones to complete assignments may not be as practical.

The barriers and inequality in distance education is further deepened by lack of study space conditions. Research has found that approximately 33% of students lack such place for studying (Li et al 2020). The lack of your own table, room or quiet environment to study may lead to ineffective distance education as students face difficulties in concentrating, understanding course content and engaging in virtual classrooms.

From such research it is apparent that although distance education provided an opportunity to continue learning, the sudden shift combined with the lack of investment and development on e-learning may have further complicated the transition. That is, universities that relied on traditional in-classroom learning had no curriculum, guidance or training in terms of online content. As explained by Gallagher and Palmer (2020), education is the least digitized economic sector, as even in countries such as United States, (where online courses are attended by at least 33% of U.S college students) there is lack of investment in online and remote learning. This has shown that the lack of experience and focus on distant methods of education have contributed to the obstacles faced, thus, not allowing the full potential of distance learning to be uncovered.

The extent to which professors and students were prepared to move to distance learning was greatly influenced by the extent to which educational technologies were used before school closures. Finland's wide utilization of ICT even before school closures allowed Finish schools to face less challenges during the transition to distance learning (Sahlberg 2020). As explained by Sahlberg (2020), around 70% of professor were using digital resources in their teaching practices, thus, they were more familiar and confident when moving fully online during COVID- 19. Reports also show that, in OECD countries, 53% of lower – secondary professors utilized education technology frequently for class work or project (OECD, 2020). In developing countries, such percentage is much lower, thus, the adaptation of distance methods of learning becomes a greater challenge. As explained by OECD (2020) report on teacher's and student's readiness for distance learning, in order to ensure an effective distance learning process, teachers need extensive quality training in how to utilize and incorporate ICT in course curriculums.

(ii) **Competencies and pedagogies on distant education**

The importance of adapting and utilizing education technologies brings the next important aspect of distance learning which is developing competencies and pedagogies required in distance learning. Research has found that the access to technological devices and technical infrastructure alone will not improve distance learning if education providers do not have the competencies and pedagogies required to carry an effective online/remote teaching (Gouëdard 2020). To have such skills it is first important to emphasize the fact that distance education is not a mirror to traditional learning, nor should it be perceived that way; rather it is a different method of education which requires different skills, resources and capabilities. Perceiving distance and traditional learning as substitute of one another has led to challenges in adapting and effectively utilizing distance learning (Gasevic 2020). Fortunately, with the wider usage of distance methods of education, professors have become more aware of the differences between these methods. As the study conducted by Lowman et al. (2020) has shown, 29% of academic faculty expressed their concerns regarding the fact that their lessons or activities did not translate well to online or remote classrooms. In-classroom and distance learning vary in several ways, thus, the ability to understand and acknowledge such differences may provide insight into better ways with which professors can translate their content to the online environment. As Queiroz (2003) explains, different from traditional teaching, where education is centered around the professor and their transmission of knowledge to students, online teaching requires more of a guidance where each student is put at the center of the learning process; thus, leading to a more autonomous learning. Even in terms of class content, different from the rigid curriculum applied in traditional classroom, the curriculum and content are much more flexible and open in structure in distance education (Queiroz 2003). With no universal curriculum in place, universities with no previous experience in distance education have faced difficulties in carrying and designing lesson plans and curriculum for online and remote learning. Competencies of distance learning rely not only on designing distance student-centered curriculums but also on the ability of students and professors to utilize education technology effectively. For this reason, training in terms of technical and professional/ pedagogical skills is required for both students and professors. Lack of curriculum and distance learning competencies has led to several issues with the learning process such as lack of communication, social interaction and issues with evaluation of students. As Dhawan (2020) explains, the human

touch and direct communication combined with technical difficulties has led to issues in communication and student participation/engagement which greatly impacts the professor's ability to effectively assess student's progress. Furthermore, designing exams in distance classrooms have also been identified as a challenge; thus, because of such issues 23% of HEIs included in the study have postponed exams while 45% have decided to carry out exams in-class but with social distancing measures in place (Marinoni et al. 2020). Instructors who teach through distance methods have four different roles: pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical responsibilities; and each of these roles requires training and support (Kebritchi et al. 2017). In addition, according to Queiroz (2003), the continuous development of competencies and pedagogical training from the professors' side can ensure a more pleasant experience with online/remote learning and thus, even increasing the demand for distance education. Distance learning can provide space and opportunity for new and innovative approaches to teaching; with training and sharing of ideas and problems, such approaches may come to light and improve the experience with distance learning.

(iii) Field of Study

Just as challenges faced may differ between students and professors, similarly, obstacles present in distance learning may differ across fields of study as well. This is because disciplines vary in their reliance in technological equipment. For instance, Natural & Applied Sciences require laboratory and equipment to which students do not have access when conducting distance education (Marinoni et al. 2020). Such obstacles limit distance learning only to the theoretical dimensions of the curriculum. The study conducted by *Kaptivo* in regards to remote and online teaching has included 116 professors upon which the majority provide teaching in tertiary education institutions and in the Natural & Applied Science disciplines abbreviated as STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) (Lawrence 2020). The responses have shown that education providers have faced many difficulties with transitioning their lessons remotely mainly because around 50% of their teaching is focused in interactive lessons and the use of a whiteboard (Lawrence 2020). Such responses show that distance education has provided challenges for effective learning especially for courses that rely on practical or laboratory work. Different from STEM courses, the survey conducted by Atubi (2020) has shown that students and professors from Social Science disciplines have been more satisfied with their distance learning experience. According to this study, more than 90% of professors and students of this field have

agreed that all facets of Social Sciences can be taught using online channels and thus, distance learning provides opportunities and potential for further improvement of courses from Social Sciences (Atubi 2020). From the comparison of these findings it is apparent that courses that are part of Social Science disciplines have greater possibility of thriving in distance education. However, such statement does not imply that STEM (Natural & Applied Science) courses have less possibility in being taught effectively but rather more investment and work is needed to transform content for the online and remote environment.

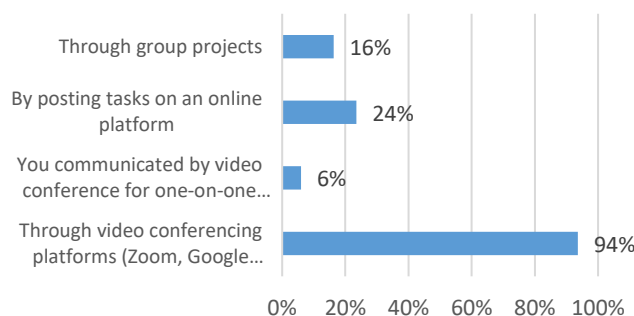
Primary Data research

As stated in the introduction section, the final objective of this study is to analyze the case of Kosovo and how its HEIs are dealing with online/remote education. Such analysis has been done using the primary research conducted with online surveys, focus group discussion and a semi – structured interview which provide insight into key challenges faced with distance learning during this short period of time. The analysis of the data collected from primary research will start with the perspectives of professors and students about remote education while in the next section the analysis will focus on their experience with respect to different disciplines and different universities (public or private).

Based on results from primary research the analysis of data has been grouped on (i) accessibility and technical infrastructure, (ii) competencies and pedagogies on distant education, (iii) curriculum and course content, (iv) field of study and (v) university funding.

(i) Accessibility and technical infrastructure

Figure 3: How have students engaged in distance learning?



Source: Survey with Students 2020

Accessibility to technological devices.

The distance learning conducted by 94% of students has been that of remote synchronous learning (Fig. 3). Around 20% have also completed group projects and homework posted on online platforms. From these results, it is apparent that synchronous learning has been the most popular method of distance education since, based on its

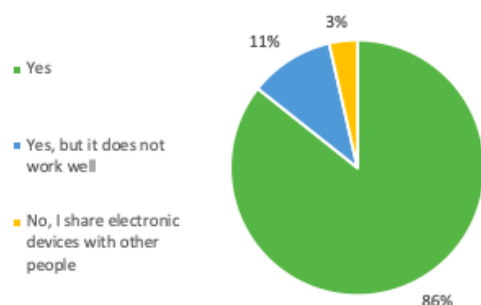
definition, it most closely resembles in-class traditional learning (“Synchronous Learning vs. Asynchronous Learning.” 2018). Therefore, the tools and online platforms mostly used for distance teaching were *Google Meet*, *Zoom* or *Big Blue Button* and the LMS utilized by the respective university at which they work (Survey with Professors 2020).

The access to technology has been quite hopeful as 95% of professors have stated that they have access to a laptop or computer and other tools such as Wi-Fi/internet, camera and online materials needed for teaching (Fig. 4).

Therefore, when asked if there is any tool (they do not

have access to) that would help their distance teaching, majority of respondents believed they have everything they need. Similarly, students were also asked about their access to technology which

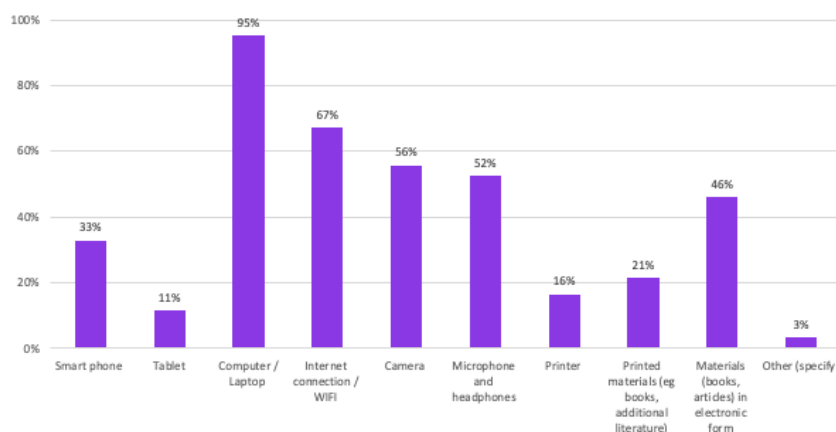
Figure 4: Student's access to technological devices to conduct distance learning



Source: Survey with Students 2020

that is people who live in remote areas, people who have other people to take care of, or people who do not have the means to relocate (cover transportation costs) (Interview 2021). Therefore, since access to tools does not seem to be the major concern for HEIs in Kosovo, attention can be

Figure 5: What technological equipment professors have available



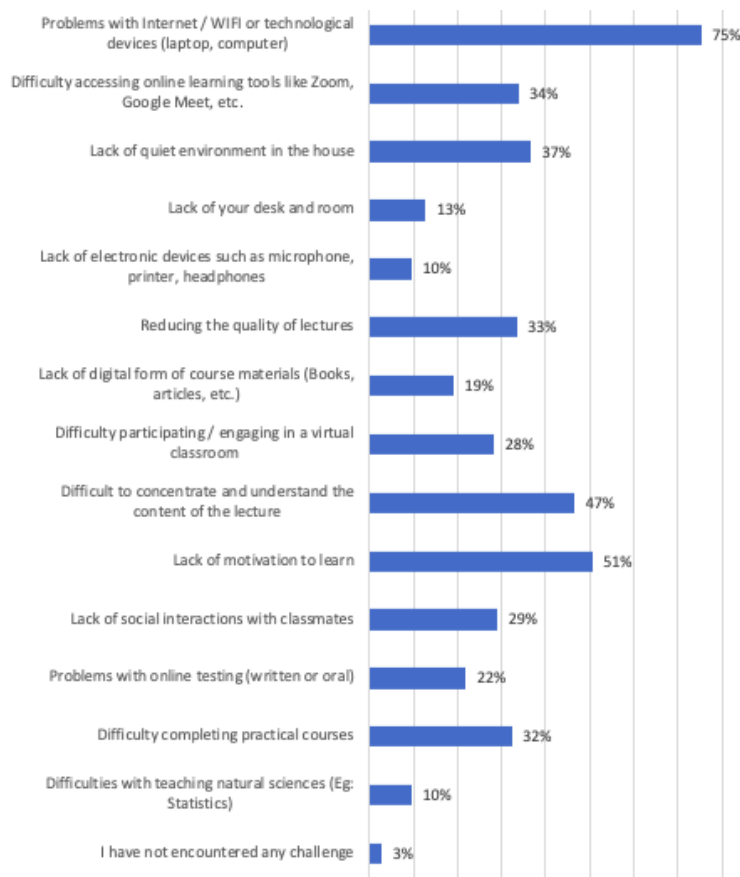
Source: Survey with Professors. 2020

85% provided an affirmative answer while only 3% said they have to share their device with others (Fig. 5). Such responses give light to the possibility of adapting distance methods even in the future as the HEIs and instructors in Kosovo have the essential tools (accessibility to technological devices) to provide distance education. With access to technological devices, distance learning makes it possible for every individual to receive high - quality education; whether

directed to designing curriculums and content delivery methods for more effective learning. In this regard, 11% of respondents (professors) expressed the need for printers and more online materials (books, articles) since not many books in Albanian language are digitalized. For other respondents who have specified their needs, they have requested stylus pen and better video conferencing platforms for classes that have more than 100 students. These responses support the argument of Marinoni et al. (2020) that Natural & Applied Sciences require more resources such as pens and tablets that can be used as interactive whiteboards. In addition, the request for better video conferencing platforms because of issues with class size shows that public universities face greater challenges in terms of distance learning as they have a larger number of students.

Technical Infrastructure. Although the access to technological devices may not be an issue, lack of strong and consistent technical infrastructure has led to 75% of student respondents (and 52% of professors) facing issues with internet and online platforms (Fig 6). Such issue has been prevalent across Kosovo as the whole education sector transitioned into distance learning.

Figure 6: The main challenges faced by students during distance learning



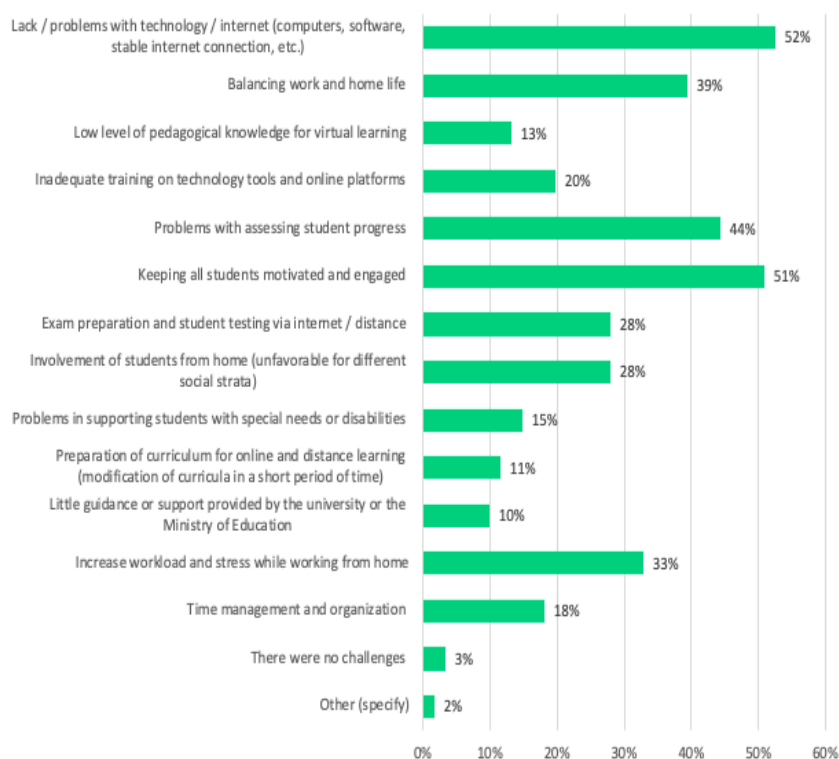
Source: Survey with Students 2020

Because the technical infrastructure was not as prepared or strong (in terms of capacity), students and instructors faced challenges in accessing course content and attending lectures. The main challenges identified have been those of numerous power cuts throughout the day, issues with internet/WIFI and inconsistent learning management systems (Focus Group Discussion, 2021).

Study Space Conditions. As the *OECD* (2020) report on teacher and student readiness for distance learning explains, creating an

appropriate climate for distance education requires not only technological accessibility, but also physical space conditions. “Much like access to computers, access to a quiet place to study may also have deteriorated during the crisis due to similar needs by parents for teleworking, and siblings for home schooling” (OECD 2020). Such statement is supported by primary research as well, where 37% of students have mentioned lack of a quiet study place as one of their main challenges (Fig 6). This shows that many students do not have appropriate study space where they can conduct their studying and concentrate on their work. This has been identified by education policy makers as well; as *Interviewee A* explains, “Conditions at home were not always conducive to this type of learning, with small spaces or many family members living under the same roof” (Interview 2021). Nonetheless, the difficulties with concentrating are also associated with the increased level of distractions that are present during distance learning. As the survey results show, 47% of

Figure 7: The main challenges faced by professors during distance learning



Source: Survey with Professors 2020

also mentioned the notion of self – control and discipline as quite impacting on whether and how distracted they get (Focus Group Discussion 2021). Furthermore, another challenge students have

students said to have faced difficulties in concentrating when learning from home (Fig 6). This has further been discussed with focus group participants which have expressed that the number of distractions is much higher in distance learning (Focus Group Discussion 2021). As students have access to their phone, computer and have the opportunity to simply mute their online lecture, there is a greater possibility that they will not listen to their lectures. Participants have

faced and which has contributed to their lack of concentration is the lack of motive to study. This issue has been identified by professors as well as 51% of survey participants have expressed concern with the inability to keep students engaged and motivated (Fig. 7). To understand why, the topic of motivation during distance learning has been discussed with the focus group as well. Based on the answers from participants, lack of motive has resulted from a combination of factors mainly, the circumstances upon which the transition occurred (during a pandemic) and the lack of experience with distance teaching (Focus Group Discussion 2021). The stress experienced during a pandemic has led to many students and instructors facing issues with their psycho – social wellbeing, which in turn, has led to being less academically motivated and more sensitive to any distractions (Focus Group Discussion 2021). Such statement has been supported by *OECD* (2020), as the report explains that the climate of uncertainty under which families are currently operating can have a negative effect in students motivation for learning. In addition, students have also showed their concern with pedagogy skills and course content which has been mainly transferred from in – class learning. The lack of interactive content and innovative approaches to teaching has led to students showing no interest or motivation for learning (Focus Group Discussion 2021).

What has also been mentioned in the Focus Group Discussion (2021) is the perception of school and learning. None of the participants have been part of distance learning prior to the pandemic, therefore, they have faced challenges with perceiving this method of learning as education. One participant has mentioned that having cameras on helped, as they got up and got dressed (as they did for traditional in – class learning) and thus, it made them feel like they were more prepared and ready for learning. What has also negatively contributed to their perception of distance learning has been the lack of social interaction with classmates. As Interviewee A stated, the socializing and networking benefits of classroom work are lost in distance learning (Interview 2021). Students have associated learning with social interactions, and the shift to distance learning has reduced such socialization.

“Students resist [distance learning] because it does not provide them with a “student experience” that requires a presence on campus where students meet and do more than learning: namely socializing and knowledge sharing” (Interview 2021).

This, in turn, has contributed to their idea that distance learning does not feel as school and thus, students were not focused nor motivated to learn as much.

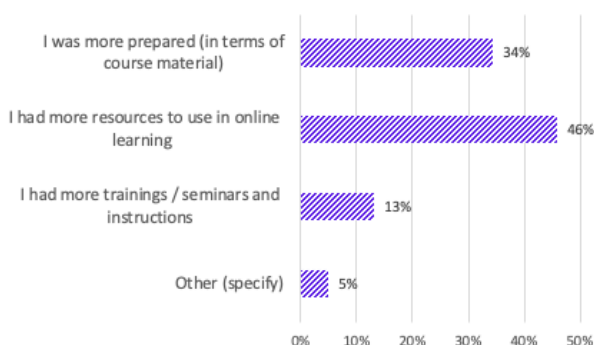
Professors have also resisted it because it makes them feel less effective. As Interviewee A explains, teaching in a classroom involves not only presenting course content but also on following facial expressions, body language, student group dynamics so that the lecturer is able to cater its lecture to the needs of the students and thus, be more effective. In using pre – recorded lectures and asynchronous learning, much of these elements are lost (Interview 2021). Similarly, these issues have been present with synchronous methods of learning as they cannot rely on visual cues.

“They need to see the students’ reactions to their lecture in order to make improvements, which they cannot do if students who participate in online lectures keep their cameras off (this is a common complaint of university lecturers). Thus, this one-way communication and lack of feedback makes distance learning less effective” (Interview 2021).

(ii) Competencies and pedagogies on distant education

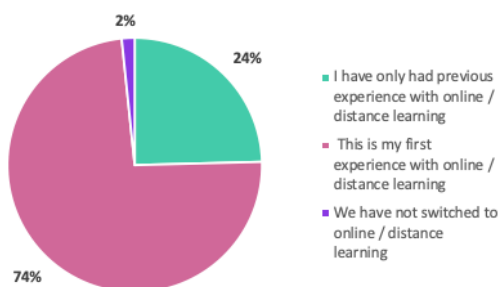
As mentioned, in the literature review, distance education methods have been utilized both in the spring and fall semester, however, during the academic summer break, HEIs have had time to further improve and develop these methods. As a result of this time taken to research, train and improve lesson plans, 78% of professors believed their experience has changed from spring to fall for the better as they have been more prepared, have had more online tools and more training/guidance for the fall semester (Fig. 8). Such support has been especially necessary and effective given that the majority of professors have not had any previous experience with distance education (74%) (Fig. 9). Even a short period of time has allowed professors to improve their teaching in distance and, thus, increase their confidence in their skills and competencies. This has been pointed even by education

Figure 8: If yes, in what aspects has your experience with distance teaching improved?



Source: Survey with Professors 2020

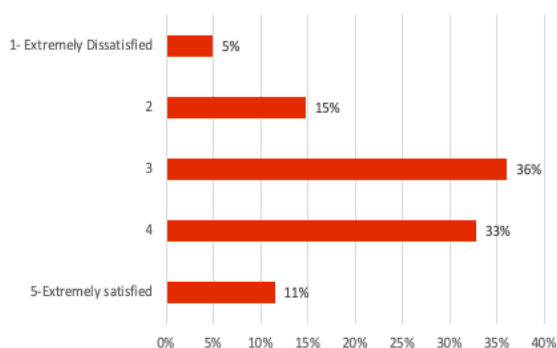
Figure 9: How would professors describe their experience with distance learning?



Source: Survey with Professors 2020

replacement with robots/technology, lack of interaction with students or lack of experience. The positive improvement in professors' pedagogic skills shows that if more effort and resources are directed toward distance education there is a greater chance of distance learning prevailing even in a post-pandemic Kosovo.

Figure 10: Professors overall evaluation of distance learning



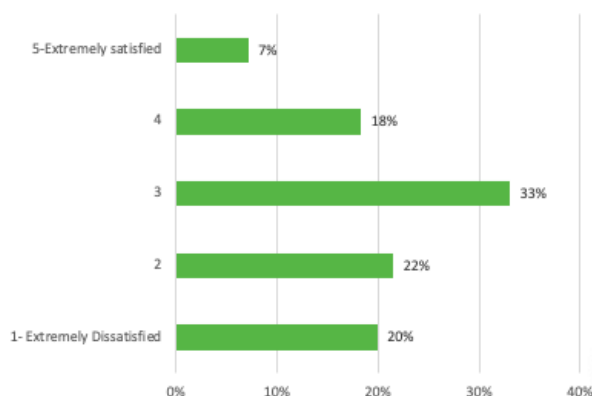
Source: Survey with Professors 2020

neutral, thus, presenting an opportunity to further push the weight towards a more positive perception in the future. Nonetheless, the average of 2.7 for students overall evaluation of their experience with distance learning shows that more effort is needed to shift student's perception/experience with distance education to a more pleasant one (Fig. 11).

experts, as the ability to move to distance methods of learning in such a short period of time using both global and local online platforms was very promising for the future of Kosovo's education system (Interview 2021). This increase in confidence is essential in providing effective distance learning. As Kebritchi et al. (2017) explains, many instructors have had negative perceptions for distance learning whether from the fear of the unknown, fear of

When asked about their overall evaluation of their experience with distance education, 36% of professors have stated that they are neither satisfied or dissatisfied while 33% have stated they are somewhat satisfied with distance learning (Fig. 10). The average of 3.4 shows that the overall evaluation of distance learning is quite

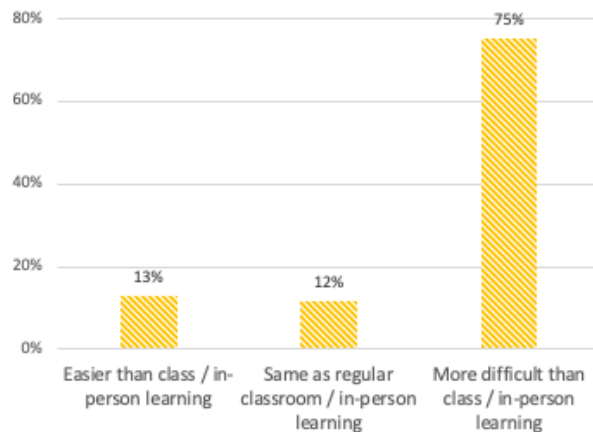
Figure 11: Students overall evaluation of distance learning



Source: Survey with Students 2020

Although distance and traditional learning cannot be easily compared, in order to uncover student's perception of distance education in terms of challenges and difficulty students were asked whether they perceived distance learning more difficult than traditional in-classroom learning. In

Figure 13: In you experience, distance learning is



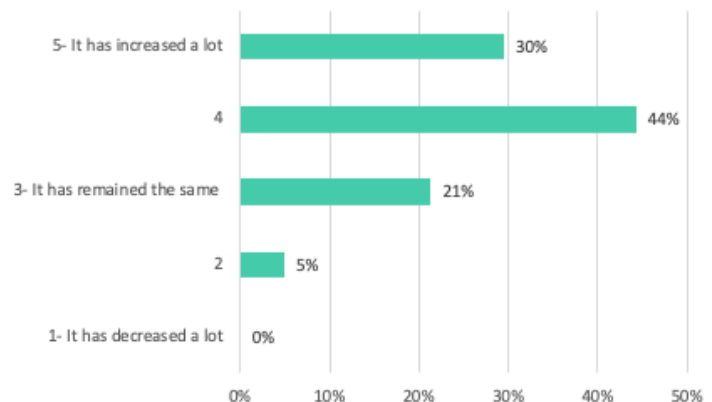
Source: Survey with Students 2020

academic factors but also non-academic factors as well. Socio- economic status, family support and the uncertainty caused by COVID – 19 may have influenced the academic performance and attitude of students toward distance learning. Nonetheless, the fact that the majority have perceived distance learning as challenging shows that there are issues or obstacles present that do not allow distance methods of education to flourish. Understanding the sudden and drastic shift the education sector has experienced, 44%

of professors stated that their workload has increased, for 30% it has increased by a lot while for 21% the amount of work remained the same (Fig. 13).

general, 75% of students said that remote/ online learning is more difficult/ challenging than traditional in-class learning. While 12% have perceived their experience with distance education easier than traditional learning (Fig. 12). It must be noted that such results may be affected by the fact that, as stated in previous research, distance learning may not be the preferred method of learning for all, given the students characteristics and learning style. In addition, such responses may come not only from

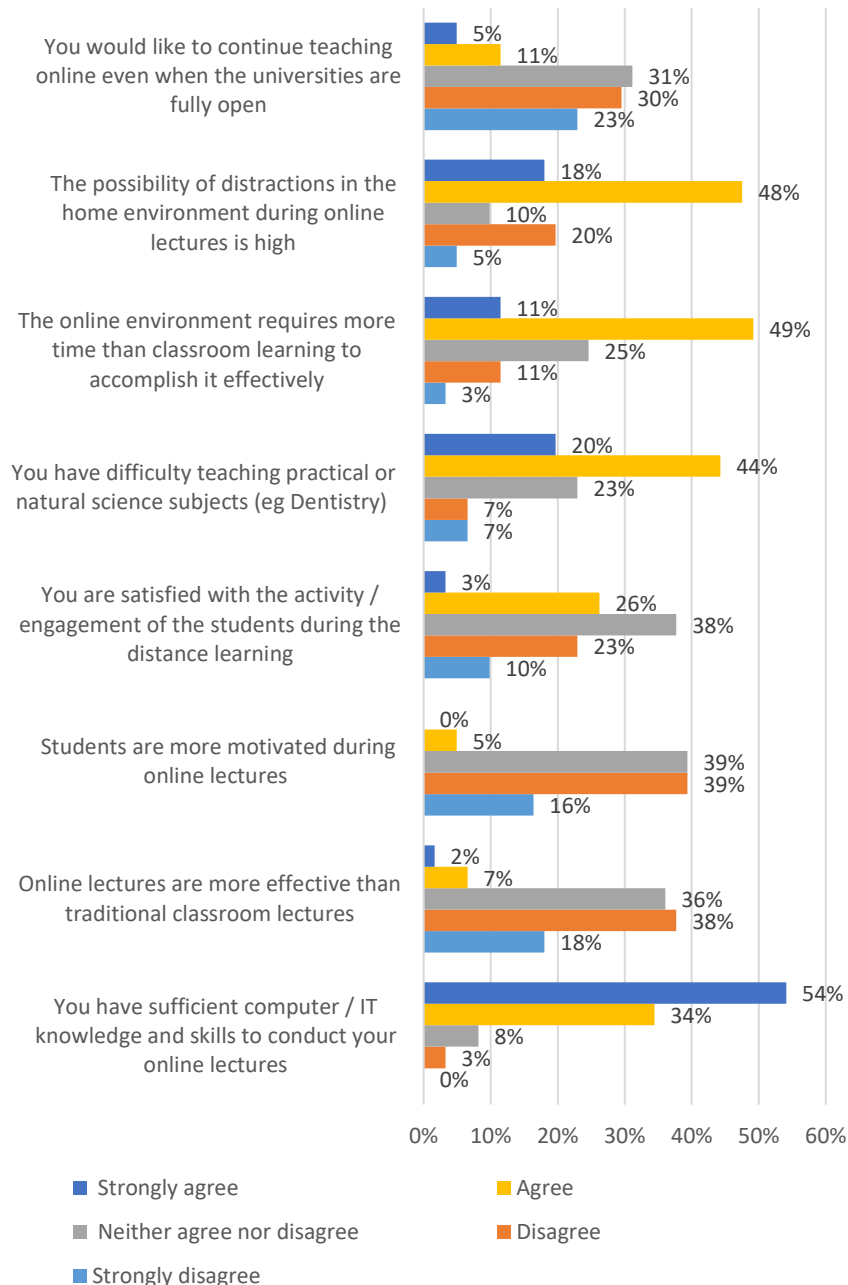
Figure 12: How was your workload changed when shifting to distance learning



Source: Survey with Professors 2020

Such results further support the statement that distance education requires more effort and time from professors (Queiroz 2003). In addition, the workload has increased also due to the fact

Figure 14: From 1-5, express your stand for these statements



Source: Survey with Professors 2020

that lesson plans needed to be translated to suit the distance learning environment and doing so, in such a short period of time, was quite challenging (Lowman et al. 2020). For this reason, 'The increased workload and stress from working at home' has been identified as one of the main challenges professors have faced with during distance learning (Fig. 7).

In terms of computer/IT skills 54% of professors strongly agreed that they have sufficient skills needed to lecture online thus, presenting a mean of 4.39 (Fig. 14). The results show that instructors of HEIs in Kosovo may not face issues in terms of IT skills. However, seeing how 38%

of respondents believe online/remote lectures are less effective shows that more focus must be put

on developing pedagogical skills required for distance learning in order to make classes more effective and interactive (Fig. 14).

(iii) Curriculum and course content

Students have also evaluated the content and structure of lectures as reduced in quality as many have faced difficulties in conducting practical classes and engaging in virtual classes. Such issues may surface due to the fact that there has not been much time available to develop new curriculums for distance learning (Lowman et al. 2020). The issues have further deepened with practical courses for both instructors and students. As survey results show, 44% of participants (instructors) have agreed that they found it difficult to teach practical courses thus, hindering curricular coverage (Fig. 14) (Li et al 2020). Similarly, *Participant C* and *F* have faced difficulties completing course content with the lack of lab work; therefore, leading to losses in learning and academic progress (Focus Group Discussion 2021).

In addition to course content, 28% of professors have also faced challenges in terms of designing exams which, in turn, has led to 44% of respondents facing difficulties with effectively evaluating the progress of students (Fig. 7).

Nonetheless, despite challenges faced, students have also experienced benefits from these methods of learning, the survey conducted shows that respondents have enjoyed the time and money saved with distance education. In addition, 27% of students have also developed new skills

Figure 15: Benefits students have enjoyed with distance learning



Source: Survey with Students 2020

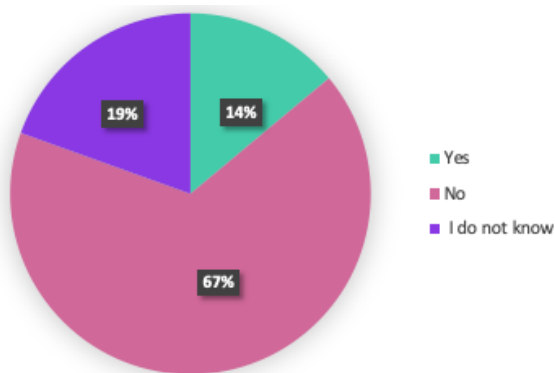
such as IT and time management skills (Fig. 15). Many respondents have also enjoyed the flexibility that distance education presents when it comes to learning. In an interesting matter, 39% of survey respondents have expressed that distance education brings less stress (Fig. 15). In open ended questions, feedback, motivation, communication have been the key words many respondents have used or expressed as

the most positive and helpful aspects when transitioning to distance education (Survey with

Students 2020). These responds have shown that communication and feedback from professors is essential in helping students see the benefits that distance learning brings. The ability to record lectures has also been pinpointed by students as one of the advantages they enjoyed from distance learning as this has allowed them to revisit lectures whenever they wish to (Survey with Students 2020).

For professors, the main benefits experienced with distance teaching are: the ability to use various technological tools/platforms online, flexibility and innovation (in terms of teaching practices). Although they understand that at its current stage distance learning may not be at its maximum effectiveness, professors have noted that with more work and effort both from students and professors drastic improvements could happen (Survey with Professors 2020).

Figure 16: If distance learning is still available, would you like to take online / distance classes even when universities are fully reopened?



Source: Survey with Students 2020

As survey participants have weighed the benefits and challenges faced with distance learning, 67% of students have stated that if distance learning is still available, they would not prefer to take online / remote classes (even when universities are fully reopened) (Fig. 16). In open ended questions, students have explained their preference for traditional in – class learning, mostly in terms of the lower effectiveness of distance learning. In contrast, the 14% of respondents that would like to

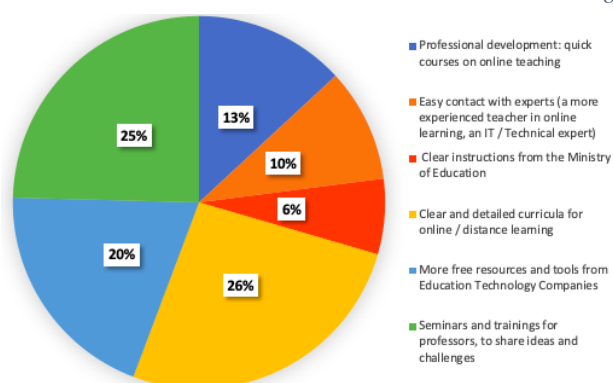
enroll in online/remote courses explained that, distance learning has brought a great opportunity to continue receiving high – quality education while not incurring the travel costs associated with in-class learning (Survey with Students 2020).

Similarly, majority of professors have also expressed their concerns with distance learning by stating that they would not prefer distance learning for the future (Survey with Professors 2020). The reason for such answers were further understood from the responses to open ended questions regarding their distance teaching experience. The answers showed that impressions were quite mixed, some saw traditional classroom teaching as irreplaceable, especially when it came to

practical subjects/courses while others believed lack of digital protocol, awareness and digital ethics (for both teachers and students), kept traditional classroom the preferred method of teaching (Survey with Professors 2020). Such responses have been confirmed by *Interviewee A* as well; “the difficulties faced, whether technical or pedagogical, made distance learning no learning at all for many participants. Therefore, despite the benefits of distance learning, there may not be a natural demand for it by those participating in education” (Interview 2021). Difficulties with exams, student involvement and socialization have also contributed to professor’s preferences for in – class learning. As one respondent stated, many students have had the tendency to turn off microphones and cameras, under the pretext that they do not work which makes it more difficult for professors to assess the progress of students (Survey with Professors 2020). Such behavior shows the need for communication so that students understand why participation and engagement is as crucial in distance learning as in traditional learning when evaluating and assessing student’s progress. As part of communication, one-on-one consultations were also not very popular during distance learning. Based on survey responses, only 6% of students have had one-to-one communication with their instructors in terms of consultations regarding class content, instructions, or assignments (Fig. 3). It must be noted that lack of such one – to – one communication may be an issue in traditional in-class learning as well. But nonetheless, such lack of communication may have led to more obstacles, insecurity and uncertainty in the process of shifting and adapting to distance learning (Lowman 2020). For this reason, communication and consultation must remain at focus for the future in all methods of education.

To see what improvement or support would provide more positive perception regarding distance education, professors were asked what kind of support they need to help make distance teaching more effective and pleasant. From the responses it is apparent that majority of professors wish to have clear and detailed curriculum for distance learning and seminars/trainings for professors, not only to

Figure 17: What professors would like as support through distance learning



Source: Survey with Professors 2020

gain pedagogical competencies but also to share ideas and challenges. Because distance education requires technological tools, professors have also checked *'more free resources and tools from education technology companies'* as important for support during distance learning (Fig. 17).

Students have also provided recommendations to improve distance learning based on their experience and obstacles faced. Many students have expressed their need for better software, university websites and LMS to ensure better and more effective learning. In addition, students have recommended greater engagement and support so they feel more comfortable and confident in distance learning (Survey with Students 2020). More interactive, interesting class content through the use of different videos, articles, podcasts and other online materials. Because of the issues with online exams and distance learning assessment, students have called the need for rethinking/redesigning online exams and greater availability of online course materials, especially in Albanian language (Survey with Students 2020).

(iv) Analysis of survey results based on field of study

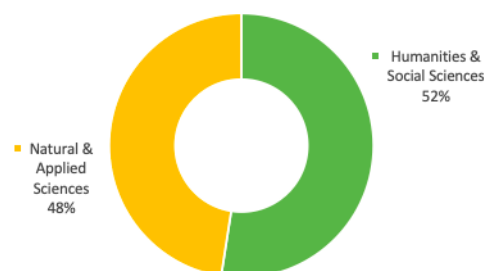
From literature review and secondary research, it has been apparent that the experience of both students and instructors differ in terms of field of study and type of university funding (public or private). To see whether such differences are evident in Kosovo as well, responses have been grouped and analyzed in terms of whether students are studying natural sciences or social sciences.

Figure 18: Field of Study where respondents conduct learning



Source: Survey with Students 2020

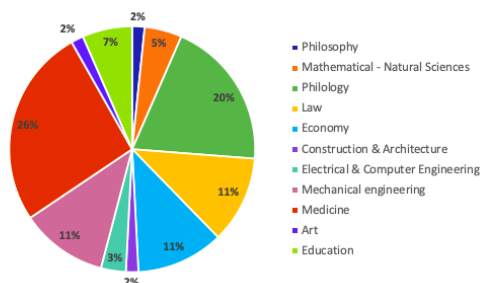
Figure 19: Field of Study where respondents provide teaching (categorized based on Social or Natural Sciences)



Source: survey with Professors 2020

The professors who have responded to the survey provide teaching in different disciplines; therefore, for an easier understanding, the several different fields of study have been grouped into Natural & Applied Sciences; and Humanities & Social Sciences (Fig. 18 & 19). From the total responses, 52% of respondents teach Social Sciences while the other 48% are professors of Natural & Applied Sciences (Fig. 19). The survey with students has also had respondents who study in different fields and universities. Out of 251 respondents, 66% study social sciences where, more specifically the majority follow studies in the field of Philology (which includes the study of languages, literature and journalism). As for the other 34% who study natural sciences, most students pursue their Bachelor degrees in the fields of Medicine or Electrical & Computer Engineering (Fig 20).

Figure 20: Field of Study where respondents provide teaching

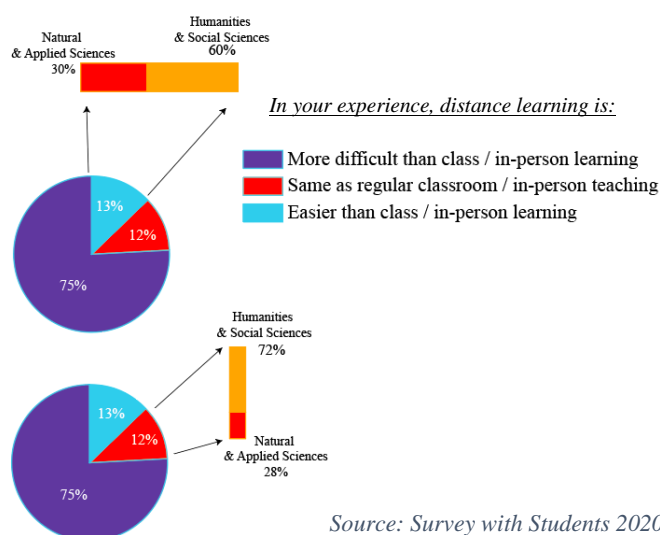


Source: Survey with Professors 2020

challenges) where 72% of respondents were students of social sciences (Fig. 21b). When evaluating their satisfaction with distance education, majority of students of natural sciences have been very dissatisfied or neutral (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) with distance education, while none have been very satisfied with distance learning. The lack of satisfaction from disciplines of natural sciences is also evident from the survey with professors

Although the majority of students have stated that they find distance learning more challenging /difficult, out of those 13% that believed online and remote learning is easier than traditional in-classroom learning majority (60%) are students who study social sciences (Fig. 21a). Similar pattern is apparent even for those who responded that distance education is the same as traditional in-class learning (in terms of

Figure 21: Student responses based on field of study



Source: Survey with Students 2020

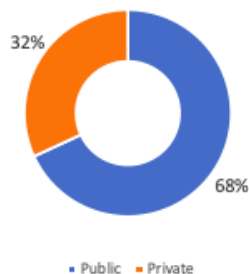
since the majority of respondents who have expressed positive comments/impressions in distance learning have been professors who provide teaching in Social Sciences. Such results come to support the study conducted by Atubi & Obro (2020) where Social Science students and professors are much more satisfied with distance learning because of the nature of the content in such courses. Even in open ended questions students of Natural Sciences have voiced their concern regarding the inability to complete practical courses, thus, causing drastic effect on learning and assessment. Such responses give light to the possibility for further technology improvement as virtual reality and other digital tools replace physical labs and therefore, lab and practical work can be conducted remotely as well.

(v) Analysis of survey results based on university (public and private)

Patterns on the survey responses have been evident even in terms of the type of university where learning takes place. As stated in the methodology

section, universities in this study have been categorized based on their funding and resources which are, thus, grouped into public or private HEIs. From survey responses, 57% of

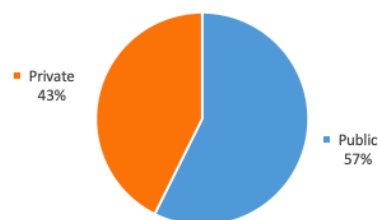
Figure 20: Survey respondents based on university where they learn (Students)



Source: Survey with Students 2020

professors presented their experience of distance teaching in public universities while the other 43% in privately funded universities in Kosovo (Fig. 22). While as for students, 68% conducted their studies in public universities while 32% in private HEIs (Fig. 23).

Figure 21: Survey respondents based on university where they teach



Source: Survey with Professors 2020

The most evident difference between these two groups in this study has been that of class size. Students in public universities attend classes where more than 100 students are present while in private universities, the total number of students is smaller, thus, class sizes are smaller. Large classes have caused issues in distance learning mainly because many video conferencing platforms allow only a certain number of users to join. For this reason, many students have had difficulties even attending their classes. The responses to open ended questions have been mostly from public universities students showing their concern regarding their large class sizes which in turn has led

to other difficulties with distance learning. Classes with large number of students have also led to issues with engaging or participating and professors have not been able to correctly assess student's progress (Focus Group Discussion 2021). With a large number of students and not enough class time for everyone to express their questions or knowledge, students felt discouraged and confused regarding course content/ assignments (Focus Group Discussion 2021). As Kumar & Mittal (2020) explain "online classes may prompt universities to merge sections, thus, increasing the class size. [However, such action] can be counterproductive". Because of this large traffic on online platforms, majority of public university students have checked difficulties in participating and understanding course content as their main challenges in online and remote learning. Another issue also evident in public universities has been the difficulties faced in online tools, namely the learning management systems used by education institutions and professors to organize, distribute and report content (Survey with Students 2020). Students have had issues several times throughout the semester with the software/system used, thus, facing difficulties in accessing content for learning or information. Fortunately, private universities have had less problems in terms of class size and learning management system. However, the lack of access to online course materials continues to remain an issue for both public and privately funded universities.

Recommendations

The abrupt and imposed transition to distance learning has proven challenging due to circumstances, lack of time and preparedness. However, HEIs and students have gained knowledge and experience which provides opportunity for further improvement of this method of learning. As associate professor of education technology, Greenhow (2020) states, distance education can be as good and effective as traditional in-classroom learning; however, to reach such effectiveness more time and effort is needed from all elements of the learning process (educational institutions, instructors and students). Both instructors and students can identify the obstacles and challenges being faced and then can work on innovative solutions that can further improve this method of learning.

From the research conducted, this study has been able to identify some of the main challenges faced for which certain recommendations will be presented with the aim to tackle such

issues and enable greater use and adaption of distance learning in a post-pandemic world. The recommendations have been grouped based on the availability of infrastructure, human resources training, networking, and education provider's support.

(i) **Infrastructure: Availability of Technology and Technical Infrastructure**

Focus on access and equity

With the sudden shift to distance education from March 2020, the logistic challenges in terms of digital tools and technical infrastructure have compelled HEIs to find innovative ways with which they can provide technological devices and study space conditions for professors and students so that everyone has the same learning opportunities (Gouédard et al. 2020).

Build public – private partnerships. According to a report prepared by USAID, the access to technological devices can be achieved by developing public-private partnerships with internet providers, online platform and technology companies (“Higher Education Response to COVID-19: A Landscape Map of USAID Partner Countries” 2020). As UNESCO Director-General Azoulay states, “Never before have we witnessed educational disruption at this scale. Partnership is the only way forward” (“Global Education Coalition for COVID-19 Response” n.d.). Such partnership is necessary not only between universities and companies but also with the government; such establishment of partnerships, then, allows more favorable and reduced costs in terms of internet and technological devices. Furthermore, as stated by USAID, the partnerships established during these times, of course, can be further maintained to think beyond times of crisis (“Higher Education Response to COVID-19: A Landscape Map of USAID Partner Countries” 2020).

Utilize Loan Equipment Services. As Heitz (2020) explains, accessibility to technological devices can be also provided through increased equipment loan service. This solution must be used with caution as borrowed equipment may be damaged, stolen, lost or vandalized. For this reason, educational institutions or companies who are providing the loan services must design an Equipment Loan Form in which the borrower (whether student or instructor) is held accountable for the borrowed product.

Improve technical infrastructure. As primary research shows, students have faced challenges with technical infrastructure. Such issues are mostly highlighted in public universities

in Kosovo as the large number of students has posed challenges in terms of virtual class sizes. This is because large class sizes lead to issues in attending online classes and engaging in in-class discussions. Existing research suggests reducing both class size and duration to ensure more effective learning as students are able to participate and concentrate in course content (Kumar & Mittal 2020). Another issue prevalent in public universities (based on survey responses) has been the lack of effective and consistent LMS. To resolve such problems, Plitnichenko suggests working with learning consultants and IT departments to ensure that the learning systems work consistently and IT assistance is available whenever needed (2020).

Provide space to study. As for students who lack space and environment to study and learn, universities can provide their campus area and libraries for students (with social distance measures in place). Similar to the guidance of Higher Education Commission in Pakistan, priority should be given to low-income students, foreign and students who need school resources to conduct their research (“HEC Issues New Policy Guidance for Universities’ Online, Hybrid Operations” 2020).

Apply principles of redistributive justice to solve issues of equity.
Students from Low -income households. The transition to distance learning has exacerbated inequalities around the world; therefore, redistributive justice is required to reduce such inequalities and provide support and resources to those who have been affected, whether socially, economically or academically (“Protecting and Transforming Education for Shared Futures and Common Humanity A Joint Statement on the COVID-19 Crisis” 2020). As secondary research shows, distance education has emphasized the inequality in terms of access to technology and internet, thus, shifting to distance education requires the design of programs tailored to the needs of students who are vulnerable in terms of technology (Patrinos 2020).

Students with disabilities. In addition, although distance education has provided opportunity to continue education for students with disabilities, additional resources are required to ensure that such students are provided high quality education. To ensure equity in distance, Plitnichenko (2020) and Barden (2017) recommend on investing or borrowing tools such as lesson scripts, video transcript, braille keyboard and other software’s that support students in their learning process.

Students pursuing education in Natural Sciences. Although there is a call for equal distribution of technological devices and infrastructure, it is important to understand that not all fields of study require the same number of technological devices to ensure qualitative and effective learning. Both natural and social sciences require the basic technical infrastructure (digital devices, learning management system, internet) for online and remote learning. However, from research it is apparent that because of the nature of STEM courses and their focus in practical and applied dimensions of curriculums, Natural Sciences require more investment in technological devices. Because of the lack of technological tools (i.e. digital pens and tablets) for Natural Science courses, students from all levels of education are feeling frustrated as they face difficulties in understanding course content (Willingham 2020). For this reason, courses which require more practical and exercise work also require more investment in terms of resources just as in traditional learning (because of laboratories, tools etc.). If such tools are not available, professors have been advised to focus on broader concepts and smaller parts of modules so that students have time to understand and review their work (Ferlazzo 2020; Sutton 2020).

(ii) People - Technology Literacy and Training

Support Students

Address student inequalities early. Students differ not only in their learning styles but also in the quality of the education that they receive. Thus, the inequality that results from the quality of education received leads to different challenges during the learning process. As Sahlberg (2021) explains, this calls for intervention policies that help students “catch up” on their learning and thus, reduce performance gaps between students from their early education. To ensure this equality, experts have suggested tutoring and summer school programs which ensure students who require more assistance in learning have the opportunity to “catch up” (Meckler and Natanson 2020). Addressing such inequalities early presents less issues for the future when there are drastic shifts such as the one currently witnessed. With the transition to distance learning, inequalities and gaps in education quality have only exaggerated, thus, such inequalities call the need for policies and programs that provide extra help to students and do not allow inequality gaps to increase.

Building self-directedness. According to Sahlberg (2021), students who are more autonomous often perform better when it comes to learning (whether in normal or crisis situations)

compared to those who are less independent. Similarly, the study of Santos and Camara (2010) on the learner's role in effective distance learning, emphasizes the need to design curriculums and train instructors to focus not only on acquiring knowledge but also on investing on a humanistic education that builds self-directed and innovative students. As instructors focus on building autonomy and self – motivation, distance learning has a much better chance in being effective in the future as it is focused on a student-centered learning approach.

Support faculty.

The obstacles present with distance learning competences and pedagogies can be resolved with greater support for faculty in different ways. As stated, by Bower (2001), distance teaching requires new competences and pedagogies, thus, much of the work in the effectiveness of distance learning falls in the training and skills of professors. Distance education requires a different form of delivering content, thus, new skills and much more planning in the part of professors is needed. Such drastic changes in such a short period of time may trigger insecurities in terms of the competencies in teaching as they have been used to being experts in their field of study (Bower 2001). For this reason, support in developing the necessary skills and curriculum is essential in order to reduce the resistance and insecurity in terms of adapting distance methods of education. With the support of faculty, the possibility of distance education being demanded and supplied more in the future increases significantly as confidence in teaching and learning remotely increases.

Encourage technical assistance. In terms of their technical skills, majority of instructors in OECD countries had participated in training regarding the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in 2018 (Gouëdard 2020). Nonetheless, 18% of these trained instructors still reported a need for continuous development and training in educational technology (Gouëdard 2020). Similarly, in Kosovo, many professors have had training in the use of ICT, however, given that such training happened in 2016 (and many new innovations or technological development occurred from that time), instructors require extensive training in their technical skills (Travers 2020). The main way with which faculty can be supported is by encouraging technical assistance in development of curriculum and content delivery to ensure better quality and more effective distance teaching (Bower 2001). In addition, distance education requires for constant evaluation of tools and lesson plans developed for online courses since with the continuous

development of technology, distance education continuously changes and advances (Queiroz 2003). With technical assistance and communication with technology experts, instructors can expand their knowledge on technology tools and understand which contribute to effective distance teaching in their field of study.

Provide training. Similar to the technical assistance and training, instructors also need training for their pedagogical and managerial (organizational) skills, both of which are focused toward shifting to a student – centered approach. According to Kebritchi et al. (2017), training must be divided into three phases: design, delivery and follow – up. The design phase focuses on choosing the resources and class materials that interest and engage students. In delivering, instructors ensure that all materials are effectively presented in digital forms and are easily accessible by students (this is where managerial skills come into play as well). Lastly, in the follow-up phase, the instructor is concerned with receiving feedback from students to understand how effective the learning activities have been (Kebritchi et al. 2017). Detailed training in all three phases with continuous discussions, questions will significantly improve the pedagogical skills regarding distance learning. The development of curriculums for distance education and training for content delivery can be done through workshops especially during academic break since during that time professors have more time to focus in their skills (Bower 2001). Training and seminars allow even professors between themselves to share ideas, problems and develop innovative solutions that can improve their interpersonal dimensions in remote and online learning.

Build a Learning Bridge. Ministry of Education (MoE) and other government educational institutions can have a crucial role in distance learning as well. By providing support for HEIs, instructors and students, MoE can provide a space where people can gain knowledge on how to use online platforms, how to develop curriculums, how to plan learning and how to communicate remotely. In addition, a website or online platform where instructors interact can help improve distance teaching as they share ideas, resources, problems and solutions. For instructors and students who have had no previous experience with distance learning, simple instructions on how to join online meetings, how to submit assignments and how to access course content are essential. These instructions can be given in Albanian, English, Serbian, Turkish and Bosnian using text, images, and videos. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous section, government institutions

can also act as facilitators which ensure and easier process of developing partnerships or any support needed to ensure access to technological devices for both students and instructors.

(iii) Networking – Collaboration, communication and support

Communicate

With increased levels of anxiety and stress resulting from a worldwide pandemic and a drastic shift to distance learning, an emphasis has been put on communication as well. Whether to improve academic performance or ensure mental health wellbeing. As existing evidence has shown, majority of students and academic staff have expressed their concerns with limited communication from their institutions in terms of transparent decision making and IT assistance amongst others (“How is the education system responding to COVID-19?” 2020). Both for professors and students, communication and transparency reduce uncertainty and ensure greater confidence in their abilities to teach/learn using distance methods.

Ensure Psycho – Social Wellbeing. As a worldwide pandemic continues to cause disruption and social distancing rules remain in place, people’s mental health must remain at focus. The drastic change has led to people feeling isolated and anxious. On top of that, student’s workload and efforts to thrive in these new methods of learning are only adding to their stress (Schroeder 2020). Similarly, instructors expectations to translate their teaching to effective distance learning in such a short period of time has only added to their emotional and mental struggles (Schroeder 2020). Mental health is a crucial component, therefore, much of the focus must be put to ensure each person’s wellbeing. Communicating, building trusting relationships and taking this slowly are essential steps required in an effective distance learning (“Supporting Student and Educator Mental and Emotional Well-Being in Distance Learning” n.d.). Expectations and deadlines before a pandemic must be modified, where both students and instructors focus on simplicity and quality (“Supporting Student and Educator Mental and Emotional Well-Being in Distance Learning” n.d.). Based on UNICEF’s (n.d) guidance for *Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support*, students and instructors need support whether through care messages, active listening or peer support groups. Such elements serve as mechanisms from which psycho - social wellbeing is put at focus.

Socialize. As Gouëdard et.al. (2020) explains, education is not only about ensuring good “physical and mental health, but also the development of socio-emotional skills, by preserving the school community, and the link between peers and teachers”. Such socialization can be done by taking advantage of different online events, games, movies and discussions.

Ensure instructor and student readiness. The transition to distance learning has greatly impacted the academic performance of students as their expectations and readiness to learn remotely have been greatly challenged. All of these factors are influenced not only by the current situation, but also their learning style, degree of autonomy and cultural background (Kebritchi et al. 2017). As distance learning brings together student from different backgrounds with different perception and expectations from learning, communication becomes essential in building a common ground for effective learning (Luyt 2013). As research shows, students expect instant feedback and email responses, they face issues with assessment methods and assignment instruction which, in turn, has led to negative perceptions regarding distance learning. More specifically in Kosovo, survey responses and focus group interviews have shown that students are not very interested in learning remotely in the future as the lack of previous experience together with other challenges faced have resulted in a negative perception. Such views, then, lead to issues with motivation and academic performance. Similarly, many instructors have also had negative perceptions for distance learning, whether from the fear of the unknown or fear of replacement with technology, amongst others (Kebritchi et al. 2017). Negative perception, whether for students or instructors, becomes an obstacle for the future of distance learning in a post – pandemic world and thus, it must be minimized through communication. As Kebritchi et al. (2017) states, communication is essential in setting realistic expectations and preparing students for distance learning. According to Armstrong (2011), students require more communication not only in terms of instructions but also in terms of educational conversation. “When communication was perceived lacking, participants lower their approach, electing for more strategic or surface learning” (Armstrong 2011). Especially during a pandemic outbreak where uncertainty levels are quite high, communication reduces the stress of school as students are informed of what they are expected to learn and work on to improve their academic performance.

Establish relationships and support groups.

The establishment of relationships and partnerships around the globe is a step toward greater support and improvement of the experience with distance learning. As suggested by USAID on their report, partnerships with software and technology companies can greatly contribute in access to educational technology (“Higher Education Response to COVID-19: A Landscape Map of USAID Partner Countries” 2020). In addition, partnerships not only help in terms of technological resources but also on psycho – social support and knowledge gain through communication and sharing of experiences and ideas. As Schwartz (2020) explains, using online platforms such as *PenPal School*, students and instructors from around the world can build relationships and collaborate on projects and ideas that are of interest to them. According to Tuominena (2021), social media groups for professors, provides a place to share, identify and meet their needs for effective distance learning. When distance education is combined with times of hardship and isolation, partnership and online communities help people feel less alone.

(iv) Education Providers – Curriculum, Assessment and Policies

Develop Curriculum for Online/Remote Environment

Curriculums require development and changes based on the method on which learning is taking place. As distance and traditional in – class learning are not substitute or mirror of one another; each require a different approach and thus, a different program plan (Gasevic 2020). As a worldwide pandemic is combined with lack of experience, training and time to prepare, majority of instructors use predefined content during distance learning; thus, contributing to a less effective distance learning (Kebritchi 2017). For instructors and educational institutions, the shift to distance learning and the opportunity it presents for a post – pandemic future means a shift in the educational paradigm, where instructors are no longer the center of the learning process, but rather the student is (Queiroz 2003). Curriculums of courses require developments and changes by focusing on humanistic education and practices that stimulate students to be more autonomous while instructors facilitate student learning and engagement (Queiroz 2003). As Sahlberg (2021) suggests, curriculums must be focused on “self-directed learning through projects and real-life problem- solving that [make] many students familiar with independent study and self-assessing their own learning”. The nature of distance learning classes requires a more flexible and open

structure, where with continuous innovation and developments, both students and instructors are able to integrate new technologies and tools to provide a more effective learning. Education policy maker, Interviewee A, also suggests shorter and more effective lectures (dividing up the lecture topically into 15-minute segments) and using pre – recorded sources (graphs or videos) to make the lecture more versatile and effective (Interview 2021). For countries such as Kosovo, who have little to no prior experience with developing distance learning curriculums, Schwartz (2020) recommends using international sources such as *BBC Teach* and *ABC Education*, amongst others, that provide resources and ideas for different courses. In addition, Morris (2020) and her colleagues have also provided a wide array of ideas and insights that help in developing an online curriculum.

Based on course content. Curriculums must be shaped based on course content as well. To develop such lessons plans and curriculums tailored to course content, Professor Kumar & Mittal (2020) recommended classifying courses based on pedagogical components (such as theoretical courses, clinical courses, courses involving fieldwork and courses involving laboratory experiments, amongst others). Such classification then can allow professors and HEIs to develop curriculums and lesson plans based on feasibility and resources available. Although this solution is easier said than done, it is essential to focus on this issue given that HIEs focus on internet and technological devices to provide their learning.

Design and pilot new methods of assessment

As distance learning requires a change in delivering course content, similarly, it also requires the need to design and pilot new methods of assessment that can more effectively evaluate and assess students' progress. Given that assessment methods used in traditional in – class learning are not applicable or effective in distance learning, primary and secondary research has showed the concern of students and instructors facing challenges in accurately assessing learning progress. When choosing the assessment methods, instructors must take into consideration the technical limitations (in terms of digital devices and infrastructure) and emotional distress (especially in crisis situations) (Kumar and Mittal 2020). In addition, the assessment options are also influenced by the course itself, for instance, assessment on Natural Science courses (such as Mathematics or Medicine) may require more technological investment in order to be effective (Kumar and Mittal

2020). Assessment can be conducted using a combination of formative and summative assessment. Formative assessments (a continuous evaluation of students' progress throughout the learning activity), such as in – class discussion, peer reviews and small group work can be utilized so that learning becomes more student-centered and thus, complements the structure upon which distance learning works (“Formative and Summative Assessments” n.d.). In contrast, summative assessment is the evaluation of a student's learning at the end of a chapter or course. This form of assessment is more formal and includes exams, final projects, presentation, essays and reports. As explained by Kumar and Mittal (2020), technological intervention is required when this form of assessment is utilized in distance learning to ensure examination etiquette and ethic. In distance learning, the formats mostly used are online examination (which is similar to in – class examination, however it includes technological intervention), open book examination (which is mostly focused on applying theory and course concepts to practical cases), oral examination and class assignment (projects, presentation etc.) (Kumar and Mittal 2020). In many countries, including Kosovo, the transition to distance learning has led to education institutions piloting and exploring forms of assessments that have not been previously utilized. Therefore, trying out and combining different assessment methods based on the feasibility, cost – benefit analysis and field of study can provide an opportunity to further improve distance learning in a post – pandemic future (Kumar and Mittal 2020).

Modify University Policies

As HEIs play an essential role in the effectiveness of distance learning, Kumar and Mittal (2020) recommend using policies to ensure that instructors and students have the environment and infrastructure available to conduct distance learning. Such environment is provided by modifying existing policies and creating new ones. Whether related to student attendance, academic performance requirement, workload or technical infrastructure, HEI's need to modify policies as a way to complement distance learning and coordinate such actions within departments or courses based on their demands (Kumar & Mittal 2020). For instance, practical courses that require lab or field work may need more and a greater variety of technological devices, therefore, a different policy may be applied to such courses compared with theoretical classes. Based on its analysis of Finland's transition to distance learning, (a country well- known for its high-quality education),

Sahlberg (2020) suggest policies where teachers are given more trust and autonomy as professionals. More specifically, in uncertain times, education institutions should focus on instructors' expertise and experience during their decision-making process as they are the ones who are closest to the students and learning process (Sahlberg 2020).

Conclusion

Distance learning methods have been present from the 18th century, however, with the world moving to the information age these methods have been digitalized as well. As online and remote methods of learning have provided flexibility and opportunities for gifted students and those with disabilities, distance education has not been as utilized as one might have expected. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the world has shifted to distance learning, thus, bringing all strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of these methods to surface.

The secondary research has provided a global approach to the topic where the challenges and opportunities of students and professors around the world have been presented. The main challenges presented have been those of (i) access to technological devices and technical infrastructure; (ii) lack of distance learning pedagogies and competencies; and (iii) differences in experiences based on fields of study and university funding . Based on primary research, similar challenges have been apparent even in the case of Kosovo and its HEIs. Research has also supported the hypothesis that students and professors from Nature & Applied Sciences face greater challenges and thus, have been less satisfied with distance education. In terms of HEIs funding, public universities have greater demand on technical infrastructure (due to greater number of students). In addition, with the relatively lower funding available it becomes more challenging to provide all resources needed for distance learning. For this reason, students and education providers from public HEIs in Kosovo have faced more obstacles when learning remotely or online.

Based on the research conducted and the information gathered several recommendations have been provided such as: focusing on technological accessibility and technical infrastructure, supporting faculty and students through training and assistance, and developing student – centered curriculums, amongst others. Taking into consideration the current circumstances, emphasis has been put on collaboration and communication as well, where providing academic and psycho –

social support is essential for effective learning. Furthermore, modifying university policies that improve the learning process can help pave way for a post – pandemic world where distance learning becomes an integral part of Kosovo’s and other country’s education system.

References

- Armstrong, David, (July 2011). "Students' Perceptions of Online Learning and Instructional Tools: A Qualitative Study of Undergraduate Students Use of Online Tools". *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology* <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ944973.pdf>
- Atubi, O., Favour, A., & Obro, S. (2020). Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and the upsurge of online learning: Prospects for social studies in Nigeria. *Journal of the Social Sciences*, 48, 4002–4009. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344269911_Covid-19_pandemic_lockdown_and_the_upsurge_of_online_learning_prospects_for_social_studies_in_Nigeria/citations
- Barden, Jessica (2017, April 16). "5 Benefits Of eLearning For Disabled Students". *ELearning Industry*. <https://elearningindustry.com/5-benefits-of-elearning-for-disabled-students>
- Bower, B. L. (2001). Distance Education: Facing the Faculty Challenge. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 4(2).
<https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer42/bower42.html>
- C2i Dashboard. (n.d.). Retrieved December 25, 2020, from
<https://collegecrisis.shinyapps.io/dashboard/>
- Castonguay, Chelsea (2020, December 4) "What is the Current COVID Situation for Universities and Colleges Around the World?" . Retrieved January 5, 2021, from
<https://www.masterstudies.com/article/what-is-the-current-covid-situation-for-universities-and-colleges-around-the-world/>
- Chaney E. G. (2001). Web-based instruction in a Rural High School: A Collaborative Inquiry into Its Effectiveness and Desirability. *NASSP Bulletin*, 85(628), 20-35.
- Dachos, Jim (2020, August 28). "5 new benefits of online learning in rural areas." *SmartBrief*.
<https://www.smartbrief.com/original/2020/09/5-new-benefits-online-learning-rural-areas>
- Dalton, Jane. (2020, May 1). "Coronavirus: Pandemics will be worse and more frequent unless we stop exploiting Earth and animals, top scientists warn" *The Independent*. Retrieved March 26, 2021, from <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/coronavirus-pandemic-virus-disease-wildlife-environment-farming-infectious-a9487926.html>

- Dhawan, S. (2020). Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520934018>
- Ferlazzo, L. (2020, May 9). “‘Less Is More’ in Math Distance Learning (Opinion)”. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-less-is-more-in-math-distance-learning/2020/05>
- “Formative and Summative Assessments” (n.d.). *Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning*. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/Formative-Summative-Assessments>
- Gaebel, Michael (August 2020). “Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education” International Association of Universities. https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_covid-19_on_he_july_2020_.pdf
- Gallagher, Sean and Jason Palmer (2020, September 29) “The Pandemic Pushed Universities Online. The Change Was Long Overdue”. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2020/09/the-pandemic-pushed-universities-online-the-change-was-long-overdue>
- Garnett, A. G. (n.d.). *What’s the Difference Between a Public and Private University?* Retrieved January 7, 2021, from <https://www.edmit.me/blog/whats-the-difference-between-a-public-and-private-university>
- Gasevic, Dragan “Steep learning curve”. (2020, April 26). Monash Lens. <https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2020/04/26/1380195?slug=covid-19-the-steep-learning-curve-for-online-education>
- Gilbert, B. (2015). “Online Learning Revealing the Benefits and Challenges.” *Education Masters*, 34. Retrieved from https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters/303/
- “Global Education Coalition for COVID-19 Response.” (n.d.). Retrieved March 28, 2021, from <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition>
- Gouëdard, P., B. Pont and R. Viennet (2020), "Education responses to COVID-19: Implementing a way forward", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 224, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/8e95f977-en>.

- Greenhow, Christine. (2020, June 4). “Ask the Expert: Online learning vs. classroom learning”. *MSU Today* / *Michigan State University*. Retrieved March 14, 2021, from <https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2020/ask-the-expert-online-learning-vs-classroom-learning/>
- “HEC Issues New Policy Guidance for Universities’ Online, Hybrid Operations” (2020, November 27). Higher Education Commission, Pakistan Retrieved January 5, 2021, from <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/news/news/Pages/New-Policy-Covid-19.aspx>
- Heitz, Christine, Martha Laboissiere, Saurabh Sanghvi, and Jimmy Sarakatsannis (2020, April 23) “Getting the next phase of remote learning right in higher education” . Retrieved January 6, 2021, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/getting-the-next-phase-of-remote-learning-right-in-higher-education#>
- “Higher education: Reopening buildings and campuses”. (n.d.). *GOV.UK*. Retrieved January 5, 2021, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campus/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campus>
- “Higher Education Response to COVID-19: A Landscape Map of USAID Partner Countries”. (October 2020). 89. USAID.GOV https://www.edulinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/HE%20Response%20to%20COVID-19_Landscape%20Map.pdf
- “How countries are using edtech (including online learning, radio, television, texting) to support access to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.” (n.d.). World Bank. Retrieved January 5, 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/how-countries-are-using-edtech-to-support-remote-learning-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>
- How is the education system responding to COVID-19? (25 Nov 2020). World Economic Forum. Retrieved January 6, 2021, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/evolution-higher-education-covid19-coronavirus/>
- Kebritchi, Mansureh & Lipschuetz, Angie & Santiago, Lilia. (2017). “Issues and Challenges for Teaching Successful Online Courses in Higher Education: A Literature Review”. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*. 46. 4-29. 10.1177/0047239516661713.
- Kim, D. and Kim, D.-J. (2012), Effect of screen size on multimedia vocabulary learning. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 43: 62-70. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2010.01145.x>

Kosova fillon vitin shkollor në tetor, mësimi i kombinuar (2020, August 18). *Iliria News Agency*.

<https://ina-online.net/kosova-fillon-vitin-shkollor-ne-tetor-mesimi-i-kombinuar/>

Krasniqi – Veseli Luljeta “A do të fillojë mësimi më 14 shtator?” (01 shtator, 2020). Radio Evropa e

Lirë. Retrieved January 7, 2021, from <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/kosova-mesimi-shtator-pandemia/30814601.html>

Kumar, C. Raj & Pankaj Mittal. (2020 August) “Indian Higher Education Institutions:

Institutional Resilience for Academic Planning & Continuity” <https://www.aicte-india.org/sites/default/files/COVID-19%20Response%20Toolkit.pdf>

Large-Scale Survey during School Closures in China” Rural Education Action Program

https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/education_and_edtech_during_covid-19-final-08032020.pdf

Lawrence, Nic. (2020, April 14). “Remote Teaching Survey Results, Remote Teaching Tools”.

Kaptivo. <https://kaptivo.com/remote-teaching-survey-results-and-analysis/>

Leach, James. (2020, April 15). “How to Build & Maintain Your Distance Learning Curriculum”.

BridgeU. <https://bridge-u.com/blog/distance-learning-curriculum/>

Li, Guirong et al. (August 2020) “Education and EdTech during COVID-19: Evidence from a Large-Scale Survey during School Closures in China”. [https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-](https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/education_and_edtech_during_covid-19-final-08032020.pdf)

[1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/education_and_edtech_during_covid-19-final-08032020.pdf](https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/education_and_edtech_during_covid-19-final-08032020.pdf)

Lisa Plitnichenko (2020, April 13) 10 Challenges of E-Learning during COVID-19. *Jellyfish.Tech*.

<https://jellyfish.tech/10-challenges-of-e-learning-during-covid-19/>

Lowman, Jennifer Burcak Erenoglu, Angela Rudolph and Steve Smith (2020, October 6) Unmerited

Distress: Four Perspectives of a University Coping with COVID-19. (n.d.). Retrieved January 6, 2021, from <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/10/unmerited-distress-four-perspectives-of-a-university-coping-with-covid-19>

Luyt, I. (2013). Bridging Spaces: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Promoting Positive Online Learning Experiences. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 42(1), 3–20.

<https://doi.org/10.2190/ET.42.1.b>

Marinoni, G., van’tLand, H., Jensen T., (2020, May). “The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher

Education Around the World”. International Association of Universities. Retrieved September

30, 2020 from

https://www.iauiau.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf .

Matuga, J. M. (2009). Self-regulation, goal orientation, and academic achievement of secondary students in online university courses. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 12(3), 4-n/a. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1287037464?accountid=2770>

Meckler, L., & Natanson, H. (2020, Dec. 7). ‘A lost generation’: Surge of research reveals students sliding backward, most vulnerable worst affected. *Washington Post*. Retrieved March 14, 2021, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/students-falling-behind/2020/12/06/88d7157a-3665-11eb-8d38-6aea1adb3839_story.html

Mësimi online në distancë, ministria me grup të ekspertëve për vlerësimin e nxënësve. (2020, April 6). *Klan Kosova*. <https://klankosova.tv/mesimi-online-ne-distance-ministria-me-grup-te-eksperteve-per-vleresimin-e-nxenesve/>

National Association for Gifted Children | Supporting the needs of high potential learners. (n.d.). Retrieved February 17, 2015, from <http://www.nagc.org/>

Niazi, Shuriah (2020, November 12) “Partial reopening of campuses after months of lockdown.” *University World News*. Retrieved January 5, 2021, from <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201112150801381>

OECD (2020) “SCHOOL EDUCATION DURING COVID -19: WERE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS READY?” <http://www.oecd.org/education/Finland-coronavirus-education-country-note.pdf>

Patrinos, H., Shmis, T.. (2020, March 23). “Can technology help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on education systems in Europe and Central Asia?” *World Bank*. Retrieved October 2, 2020 from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/can-technology-help-mitigate-impact-covid-19-education-systems-europe-and> .

“Protecting and Transforming Education for Shared Futures and Common Humanity A Joint Statement on the COVID-19 Crisis” (2020, April 14). *Futures of Education* <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/373207eng.pdf>

“Qeveria e Kosovës miraton vendimin për masat e veçanta për mbrojtjen nga COVID-19”. (2020, November 1). *Zyra e Kryeministrit Të Kosovës*. <https://kryeministri-ks.net/qeveria-e-kosoves-miraton-vendimin-per-masat-e-vecanta-per-mbrojtjen-nga-covid-19/>

Queiroz, Vera. (July 2003). *Roles and Competencies of Online Teachers*. 6.

<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Queiroz-OnlineTeachers.html>

“Regional/ National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education” (2020, August)

International Association of Universities. Retrieved January 5, 2021, from https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid-19_regional_perspectives_on_the_impact_of_covid-19_on_he_july_2020.pdf

Sahlberg, P. (2021). Does the pandemic help us make education more equitable? *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 20(1), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-020-09284-4>

Santos, R., & Camara, M. (2010, April). *Reflections over the learner’s role*. 10. Retrieved January 6, 2021, from <http://www.abed.org.br/congresso2010/cd/ing/252010174412.pdf>

Schwartz, Laurel (2020, September 4). “Teaching a Global Curriculum During Distance Learning”. *Edutopia*. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-global-curriculum-during-distance-learning>

“Supporting Student and Educator Mental and Emotional Well-Being in Distance Learning”. (n.d.). <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/Documents/Supporting%20Student%20and%20Educator%20Mental%20and%20Emotional%20Well-Being%20in%20Distance%20Learning.pdf> .

Sutton, Shawn (2020, June 25) “*Adapting Science Lessons for Distance Learning*”. Edutopia. Retrieved January 6, 2021, from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/adapting-science-lessons-distance-learning>

“Synchronous Learning vs. Asynchronous Learning.” (2018, January 31). *TheBestSchools.Org*. <https://thebestschools.org/magazine/synchronous-vs-asynchronous-education/>

Tierney, K. (n.d.). *Online learning vs traditional learning*. The JotForm Blog. Retrieved December 30, 2020, from <https://www.jotform.com/blog/online-learning-vs-traditional-learning/>

Thomson, L. D. (2010). Beyond the Classroom Walls: Teachers’ and Students’ Perspectives on How Online Learning Can Meet the Needs of Gifted Students. *Journal of Advanced a Academics*, 21(4), 662-712. <http://joa.sagepub.com.pluma.sjfc.edu/content/21/4/662.full.pdf+html>

Travers Eve-anne (2020, April 10) Teachers make the push for distance learning. (2020, April 10). *Prishtina Insight*. <https://prishtinainsight.com/teachers-make-the-push-for-distance-learning/>

- Tucker, S. (2001). Distance Education: Better, Worse, Or As Good As Traditional Education? *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 4(4).
<https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter44/tucker44.html>
- Tuominen, Saku (2021, January 29). “Stories of Education Continuity from the COVID Crisis: Finland”. <https://hundred.org/en/articles/stories-of-education-continuity-from-the-covid-crisis-finland>
- “Unequal access to remote schooling amid COVID-19 threatens to deepen global learning crisis”. (2020, June 04). Retrieved March 25, 2021, from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unequal-access-remote-schooling-amid-covid-19-threatens-deepen-global-learning>
- UNESCO. (2020, April 21). *Startling digital divides in distance learning emerge*. UNESCO.
<https://en.unesco.org/news/startling-digital-divides-distance-learning-emerge>
- UNESCO (2020, August 6) “UN Secretary-General warns of education catastrophe, pointing to UNESCO estimate of 24 million learners at risk of dropping out.” Retrieved March 26, 2021, from <https://en.unesco.org/news/secretary-general-warns-education-catastrophe-pointing-unesco-estimate-24-million-learners-0>
- UNICEF. (n.d.). *GUIDANCE FOR COVID-19 PREVENTION AND CONTROL IN SCHOOLS*
Supplemental Content C: Mental Health and Psychological Social Support (MHPSS)
<https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/19646/file/C-Mental-Health-Psychosocial-Support.pdf>
- Wang, Pei-Yu. (2013, November) Examining the Digital Divide between Rural and Urban Schools: Technology Availability, Teachers’ Integration Level and Students’ Perception Published by ScieduPress <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1157686.pdf>
- Willingham, AJ (2020, September 8). “Parents’ biggest frustration with distance learning.” CNN. Retrieved January 6, 2021, from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/08/us/distance-learning-problems-parents-trnd/index.html>

Appendix 1: Survey with Professors

Given that one of the goals with the surveys is to also understand and identify any differences, in terms of experience, between disciplines and HIEs, the survey is presented initially with some profile questions regarding professors' field of study and university where they teach. The survey then moves to questions regarding their overall personal experience with distance education where respondents can identify any challenges or benefits faced from this transition.

Albanian Version

Qëllimi i këtij hulumtimi është mësimi për përvojat e mësimeve të arsimit të lartë për mësimin online/në distancë gjatë dy semestrave të fundit. Ky pyetësor synon të mësojë për përvojat tuaja si mësues gjatë krizës COVID-19 dhe kalimi nga mësime në objekte shkollore në atë nga shpia apo distanca. Të dhënat e grumbulluara nga ky hulumtim do të përdoren për temën e diplomës të cilën unë po punoj mbi sfidat dhe mundësitë e paraqitura nga edukimi në online në Kosovë. Pyetësi është anonim, prandaj ju lutemi të jeni të sigurtë në përgjigjet tuaja. Të dhënat e juaja dhe përgjigjet mbesin konfidenciale, diskrete dhe nuk do të zbulohen tek asnjë palë dhe janë vetëm pjesë e këtij studimi nga unë, Fiona Shahini, studente e RIT Kosovo (A.U.K).

Nëse keni ndonjë pyetje ose paqartësi në lidhje me këtë pyetësor, ju lutem të më kontaktoni përmes adresës elektronike fionas@auk.org

- Në cilën fushë ligjëroni?
 - Fakulteti Filozofik
 - Fakulteti i Shkencave Matematiko – Natyrore
 - Fakulteti i Filologjisë
 - Fakulteti Juridik
 - Fakulteti Ekonomik
 - Fakulteti i Ndërtimtarisë dhe Arkitekturës
 - Fakulteti i Inxhinierisë Elektrike dhe Kompjuterike
 - Fakulteti i Inxhinierisë Mekanike
 - Fakulteti i Mjeksisë
 - Fakulteti i Arteve

- Fakulteti i Bujqësisë dhe Veterinarisë
 - Fakulteti i Gjeoshkencave dhe Teknologjisë
 - Fakulteti i Edukimit Fizik dhe I Sportit
 - Fakulteti i Edukimit
 - Tjetër (specifikoni)
- A ligjëroni në universitet privat apo publik?
- Publik (Kaloni pyetjen e radhës)
 - Privat (Kaloni pyetjen e radhës)
 - Të dyja (Vazhdoni në pyetjen e radhës)
- Përvojën tuaj që po e ndani në këtë pyetësor cilit universitet i përket?
- Publik
 - Privat
- Çfarë lloj metodë keni përdorur për mësimdhënie gjatë mbylljes së universitetit (për shkak të COVID -19)
- Mësim në distancë (klasa virtuale duke përdorur platforma sikur Zoom, Google Meet, MS Teams etj.)
 - Një kombinim i mësimit online dhe komunikimit me shkrim
 - Mësim plotësisht në internet (vetëm me shkrim përmes detyrave të dërguara në formë elektronike)
 - Nuk kam ligjëruar gjatë mbylljes së universiteteve
 - Tjetër (specifikoni)
- A ka ndryshuar përvoja juaj me mësimdhënien në distancë midis semestrit pranveror 2020 dhe vjeshtor 2020?
- Po
 - Jo (Kalo pyetjen radhës)
- Nëse po, në cilat aspekte?
- Kam qenë më i/e përgatitur (për sa i përket materialit të lëndës)
 - Kam pasur më shumë burime për t'i përdorur në mësimin online
 - Kam pasur më shumë trajnime/ seminare dhe udhëzime
 - Fillimisht ka qenë dicka e re tanim veq kemi tejkaluar stresin fillestar
 - Tjetër (specifikoni)
- Nga 1-5 si ndiheni për mësimin online/ në distancë?
- | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Aspak mirë | | | | Shkëlqyeshëm |
- Si e përshkruani përvojën tuaj me mësimdhënien online/ në distancë?
- Unë kam përvojë të mirë me mësimdhënien online / në distancë

- Unë vetëm kam pas përvojë të mëparshme me mësimdhënien online / në distancë
- Kjo është përvoja ime e parë me mësimdhënien online / në distancë
- Nuk kemi kaluar në mësimin online/ në distancë
- Cilat mjete (platforma online) keni përdorur për mësimdhënien në distancë?
 - Zoom
 - MS Team
 - Google Meet/ Classroom
 - BlueJeans
 - Tjetër (specifikoni)
- Çfarë pajisje teknologjike keni në dispozicion për të punuar në distancë?
 - Telefonat e mençur
 - Tablet
 - Kompjuter / Laptop
 - Internet
 - Kamera
 - Mikrofon dhe kufje
 - Printer
 - Materiale të shtypura (p.sh. libra, literatur tjetër shtesë)
 - Tjetër (specifikoni_____)
- Cilat pajisje dhe burime shtesë (që nuk i keni) ju nevojiten për të punuar në distancë
 - Telefoni i mençur
 - Tableti
 - Kompjuteri / Laptopi
 - Lidhje interneti
 - Kamera
 - Mikrofon dhe kufjet
 - Printeri
 - Materiale të shtypura (p.sh. libra, literatur shtesë)
 - Materiale (libra, artikuj) ne formë elektronike
 - Asgjë
 - Tjetër (specifikoni_____)
- Si ka ndryshuar ngarkesa juaj e punës gjatë periudhës së mësimin në distancë krahasuar me atë më parë?

1	2	3	4	5
Është rritur shumë	është rritur pak	ka qëndruar njëloj	është ulur pak	Është ulur shumë
- Si profesor, çfarë ju ka pëlqyer në mësimin online / në distancë? (Zgjedh deri në 3 opsione)

- Fleksibiliteti
 - Mundësia për të përdorur mjete të ndryshme teknologjike
 - Përshtatja (aftësia për të personalizuar mësimin për studentët)
 - Inovacioni (liria për të eksperimentuar me praktikën e mësimdhënies)
 - Mundësia e përdorimit të platformave online (materiale dhe burime të ndryshme)
 - Angazhimi i studentëve
 - Një marrëdhënie më të mire me studentët
 - Rritja e autonomisë, motivimi, vetërregullimi mes studentëve
 - Asgjë
 - Tjetër (specifikoni_____)
- Cilat kanë qenë sfidat kryesore të cilat i keni hasur me kalimin në mësim online/në distancë? (Zgjidhni deri në 5 opsione)
- Mungesa/probleme me teknologji/internet (kompjuterë, softuer, lidhje e qëndrueshme në internet, etj.)
 - Problemet e studentëve me qasje/akses në teknologji apo internet
 - Balancimi i punës dhe jetës në shtëpi
 - Nivele të ulëta të njohurive pedagogjike për mësimin virtual
 - Trajnimi jo adekuat për mjetet teknologjike dhe platformat online
 - Përfshirja e studentëve nga shtëpitë (e disfavorshme për shtresa të ndryshme sociale)
 - Mbajtja e të gjithë studentëve të motivuar dhe të angazhuar
 - Përgatitja e provimeve për mësim online/ në distancë
 - Testimi i studentëve përmes internetit/ në distancë
 - Probleme në mbështetjen e studentëve me nevojë të veçanta ose aftësi të kufizuara
 - Probleme me vlerësim të progresit të studentëve
 - Përgatitja e planprogramit për mësimin në internet dhe distancë (modifikimi i planeve të mësimin në një periudhë të shkurtër kohe)
 - Pak drejtim ose mbështetje e dhënë nga universiteti apo Ministria e Arimit
 - Rritja e ngarkesës së punës dhe stresit duke punuar nga shtëpia
 - Menaxhimi dhe organizimi i kohës
 - Nuk ka pasur sfida
 - Tjetër (specifikoni_____)
- Ju lutemi përgjigjuni të gjitha pyetjeve duke rrethuar një nga numrat 1 - 5 ndaj secilit pohim
- Ju keni njohuri dhe aftësi të mjaftueshme kompjuterike/IT për të kryer leksionet tuaja online
 - Leksionet në internet janë më efektive sesa leksionet tradicionale në klasë
 - Studentët janë më të motivuar gjatë leksioneve në internet
 - Ju jeni të kënaqur me aktivitetin/ angazhimin e studentëve gjatë mësimin në distancë
 - Ju hasni vështirësi në mësimdhënien e lëndëve praktike apo natyrore - shkencore (p.sh. Stomatologji)

- Mjedisi online kërkon më shumë kohë sesa mësimi në klasë për ta realizuar në mënyrë efektive
 - Mundësia e shpërqendrimeve në ambient të shtëpisë gjatë leksioneve online është e lartë
 - Ju do të dëshironit të vazhdoni të jepni mësim online edhe kur të hapen universitetet plotësisht
 - Sa mirë janë studentët me mësimin online / në distancë?
 - Pothuajse të gjithë po janë të mirë
 - Është një përzierje, por shumica po ecin mirë
 - Është një përzierje, por shumica kanë probleme
 - Është shumë herët për ta treguar
 - Çfarë do t'ju ndihmonte për t'ju mbështetur në mësimdhënie në distancë gjatë kohës që universitetet qëndrojnë të mbyllura?
 - Zhvillimi profesional: kurse të shpejta mbi mësimdhënien në internet
 - Kontakt i lehtë me ekspertë (një mësues më me përvojë në mësimin në internet, një ekspert IT / Teknik)
 - Udhëzime të qarta nga Ministria e Arsimit
 - Planprograme të qarta dhe detajuara për mësimin online/ në distancë
 - Më shumë burime dhe mjete falas nga Kompanitë e Teknologjisë së Arsimit
 - Seminare dhe trajnime për profesorët, për të ndarë idetë dhe sfidat
 - A keni mbetur po aq efektiv në rolin tuaj gjatë mësimin online-nga distanca si në mësimin klasor?
 - Po
 - Deri diku
 - Jo, specifikoni dallimin në përqindje ____ % (më i dobët)
 - A është mësimnxënja në mësimin online-nga distanca e njëjtë me mësimnxënjen në klasë?
 - Po
 - Deri diku
 - Jo, specifikoni dallimin në përqindje ____ % (më i dobët)
 - Ju lutem mos ngurroni të jepni përshtypjet / sugjerimet apo sfidat në lidhje me përvojën tuaj me mësimdhënien online/në distancë
-

English Version

The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of professors with online / distance learning during these last two semesters at universities. This survey asks about your teaching experiences during the COVID-19 crisis and the transition from teaching to school

facilities to distance learning. The answers will be used to conduct a study on the challenges and opportunities presented by distance education in Kosovo. This questionnaire is completely anonymous and discreet so please be honest in your answers. Your answers will not be shared with anyone (neither university nor third party) and will only be used for the purpose of this study.

If you have any questions about this questionnaire, please contact me at fionash20@gmail.com

- In which field do you teach? (The subject (s) you teach fits best in which category)

- Faculty of Philosophy
- Faculty of Mathematical - Natural Sciences
- Faculty of Philology
- law faculty
- Economy Faculty
- Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture
- Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering
- Faculty of Mechanical Engineering
- Faculty of Medicine
- Faculty of Arts
- Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine
- Faculty of Geosciences and Technology
- Faculty of Physical Education and Sports
- Faculty of Education
- Other (please specify)

- Do you teach at a private or public university?

- Public (Skip to next question)
- Private (Skip to next question)
- Both (Continue to the next question)

- Are you sharing your experience that you are sharing or does it refer to distance learning at a public or private university?

- public
- Private

- What kind of methods did you use for teaching during school closure (due to COVID -19)

- Distance learning (virtual classroom using platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)
- A combination of distance and online classes (scheduled virtual classes from time to time and communication on online platforms)

- Full online learning (no virtual classes, communication and teaching through discussions, assignments and readings on online platforms)
 - I did not teach during the closing of the universities
 - Other (please specify)
- Has your experience with distance learning changed between the spring and fall semesters?
- yes
 - No (Skip to next question)
- If so, in what aspects?
- I was more prepared (in terms of class material)
 - I had more resources available to use in online learning
 - I had more trainings / seminars and tutorials
 - Other (please specify)
- From 1-5 how do you feel about distance education?
- 1 2 3 4 5
- Not good at all
- How would you describe your experience with online / distance learning?
- I have extensive experience with online / distance learning
 - I have previous experience with online / distance learning
 - This is my first experience with online / distance learning
 - The school has not switched to online / distance learning
- What tools (online platforms) have you used for distance learning?
- zoom
 - Microsoft Team
 - Google Meet / Classroom
 - Bluejeans
 - Other (please specify)
- What technological equipment do you have available to work remotely?
- Smartphones
 - Tablet
 - Computer / Laptop
 - WIFI
 - Camera
 - Microphone / headphones
 - Printer
 - Printed materials (eg books used in school)
 - Other (please specify)

- What additional equipment and resources (which you do not have) do you need to work remotely

- smartphones
- Tablet
- Computer / Laptop
- Internet connection
- Camera
- Microphone / headphones
- printer
- Printed materials (eg books used in school)
- Materials (books, articles) in digital form
- Other (please specify)
- nothing

- How has your workload changed during the distance learning period compared to before?

1 2 3 4 5
has grown a lot. has grown slightly. has remained the same. is slightly lowered. is very low

- As a professor, what did you like / impress about online / distance learning?

- flexibility
- Possibility to use different technological tools
- Adaptation (ability to personalize learning for students)
- Innovation (freedom to experiment with teaching practice)
- Possibility to use online platforms (various materials and resources)
- Student engagement
- An improved relationship with students
- Increased autonomy, motivation, self-determination, self-regulation among students
- nothing
- Next (please specify)

- What were the main challenges you faced in switching to online / distance learning? Choose from up to 8 options.

- Lack of access to technology (computers, software, stable internet connection, etc.)
- Students' problems with access to technology or the Internet
- Balancing work and home life
- Low level of digital pedagogical competence of teachers
- Inadequate training on technology tools and online platforms
- Involvement of students from disadvantaged social homes
- Keeping all students motivated and engaged
- Preparing exams for online / distance learning
- Testing students online / remotely
- Problems with Supporting students with special needs or disabilities

- Problems with assessing student progress
- Preparation of curriculum for online and distance learning (modification of curricula in a short period of time)
- Little direction or support given by the university or the Ministry of Education
- Increase workload and stress while working from home
- Time management and organization
- Other (please specify)
- There were no challenges

- Please answer all questions by circling one of the numbers 1 - 5 against each statement.

- You have sufficient computer / IT knowledge and skills to conduct your online lectures
- Online lectures are more effective than traditional classroom lectures
- Students are more motivated during online lectures
- You are satisfied with the activity / engagement of the students during the distance learning
- You encounter difficulties in teaching practical or natural science subjects (eg Dentistry)
- The online environment requires more time than classroom learning to accomplish it effectively
- The possibility of distractions in the home environment during online lectures is high
- You would like to continue teaching online even when the universities are fully open
-

- How well are students coping with online / distance learning?

- Almost everyone is doing really well
- It's a mix, but most are going well
- It is a mix, but most have problems
- It's too early to tell

- What would help you to support distance learning while universities are closed?

- Professional development: quick courses on online teaching
- Easy contact with experts (a more experienced teacher in online learning, an IT / Technical expert)
- Clear instructions from the Ministry of Education
- Clear and detailed curricula for online / distance learning
- More free resources and tools from Education Technology Companies
- Seminars and trainings for professors, to share ideas and challenges

- Have you remained as effective in your role during home / distance learning as you were before?

- yes
- Somewhat

- not
- Are students learning as much as they were before switching to online / distance learning?
 - yes
 - Somewhat
 - not
- Please do not hesitate to give feedback / suggestions or challenges regarding your online / distance learning experience

Appendix 2: Survey with Students

Similar to the survey for professors, the survey for students included questions regarding the profile of respondents, their overall experience, challenges and benefits. The survey was then concluded with open ended questions that encouraged respondents to provide any comments, suggestions or recommendations regarding distance education.

Albanian Version

Qëllimi i këtij hulumtimi është informimi për përvojat e mësimmxënësve të arsimit të lartë me mësimin online/në distancë gjatë dy semestrave të fundit. Përmes këtij pyetësori synohet të mësohet mbi përvojat e juaja si student gjatë periudhës së pandemisë COVID-19, më konkretisht rreth kalimit nga mësimi në objekte shkollore në atë në distancë. Të dhënat e grumbulluara pastaj do të shërbejnë për të analizuar sfidat dhe mundësitë e paraqitura nga edukimi online në Kosovë. Pyetësi është anonim, prandaj ju lutemi të jeni të sinqertë në përgjigjet tuaja. Të dhënat dhe përgjigjet e juaja mbesin konfidenciale dhe nuk do të zbulohen tek asnjë palë. Këto të dhëna do të përdoren vetëm për këtë studim i cili është punim për temën e diplomës nga unë, Fiona Shahini, studente e RIT Kosovo (A.U.K)

- Në cilin vit të studimeve jeni aktualisht?
 - Vitin e parë të studimeve
 - Vitin e dytë të studimeve
 - Vitin e tretë të studimeve

- Vitin e katërt të studimeve
- Vitin e pestë të studimeve
- Në cilin fakultet ndjekni studimet?
 - Publik
 - Privat
- Cila është dega juaj e studimeve?
 - Filozofi
 - Shkenca Matematike – Natyrore
 - Filologji
 - Juridik
 - Ekonomi
 - Edukim
 - Ndërtimtari dhe Arkitekturë
 - Inxhinieri Elektrike dhe Kompjuterike
 - Inxhinieri Mekanike
 - Mjeksi
 - Art
 - Bujqësi dhe Veterinari
 - Gjeoshkence the Teknologji
 - Edukimi Fizik dhe Sport
 - Tjetër (Specifikoni)
- Nga 1-5, sa jeni të kënaqur me mësimin online /në distancë që ju ofrohet?
- 1- Jashtëzakonisht i/e pa kënaqur; 5- Jashtëzakonisht i/e kënaqur
- Sipas eksperiencës suaj, mësimi online/ në distancë është:
 - Më i lehtë se mësimi klasor/në person
 - Njësoj si mësimi i rregullt klasor/në person
 - Më i vështirë se mësimi klasor/në person
- Na tregoni se si jeni angazhuar në mësimin në distancë (Zgjidhni të gjitha ato që vlejnë)
 - Përmes platformave të video konferencave (Zoom, Google Meet etj.)
 - Keni komunikuar me video konferencë për udhëzime një -me- një me profesorin tuaj
 - Përmes postimit të detyrave në një platformë online

- Permes projekteve në grup
- A keni qasje në një pajisje elektronike për të mësuar online/në distancë (Laptop, Kompjuterë, Tablet ose Telefon të mençur)
- Po
- Po, por nuk funksionon mirë
- Jo, unë ndaj pajisjet elektronike me persona të tjerë
- Sa e lehtë është të qëndrosh i/e përqendruar për të kryer detyrat në ambient të shtëpisë?
- 1- Nuk është aspak e lehtë 5- Shume e lehte
- Cilat janë disa aspekte positive në përvojën tuaj me mësimin në distancë? (Zgjedhni deri në 3 opsione)
- Jam mësuar se si të menaxhoj orarin tim
- Jam më i pushuar dhe më pak i stresua
- Punoj me ritmin tim - kam më shumë fleksibilitet
- Kursej më shumë kohë dhe para
- I zhvilloj aftësitë e mija në IT
- Kam më pak shpërqëndrime
- Cilat kanë qenë disa nga sfidat që keni hasur me edukimin online/ në distancë, nëse ka? (Zgjedhni deri në 5 opsione)
- Probleme me Internet / WIFI apo pajisje teknologjike (laptop, kompjuter)
- Vështirësi për të pasur akses në mjetet e mësimin online si Zoom, Google Meet etj.
- Mungesa e ambientit të qetë në shtëpi
- Mungesa e tryezës së punës dhe dhomës tuaj
- Mungesa e pajisjeve elektronike si mikrofoni, printeri, kufjet
- Ulja e cilësisë së ligjëratave
- Mungesa e formës digjitale të materialeve të lëndës (Libra, artikuj, etj.,)
- Vështirësi me pjesëmarrjen/ angazhimin në klasën virtuale
- Vështirë për tu përqendruar dhe kuptuar përmbajtjen e ligjëratës
- Mungesa e motivimit për të mësuar
- Mungesa e ndërveprimeve shoqërore me shokët e klasës
- Probleme me testimin online (me shkrim apo me gojë)
- Vështirësi për të kryer lëndët praktike
- Vështirësitë me mësimin e lëndëve të shkencave natyrore (Psh: Statistikë)
- Nuk kam hasur asnjë sfidë
- Tjetër (specifikoni)

- Nga 1-5 sa sfiduese e keni parë punën e caktuar gjatë mësimit në distancë?
1 - Shumë e lehtë; 5 – Shume sfiduese

 - A jeni duke ndjekur mësimin/ duke studiuar aq sa keni qenë para krizës COVID-19?
 - Po
 - Deri diku
 - Jo, specifikoni dallimin në përqindje ____ % (më i dobët)

 - Nga 1-5 sa efektivë ka qenë Universiteti juaj për t'ju ofruar burime/mjete për të mësuar nga shtëpia?
1- Aspak efektivë; 5- shume efektive

 - Sa mirë mund ta menaxhoni kohën ndërsa mësoni në distancë?
1- Aspak mire; 5- Jashtzakonisht mire

 - Nga 1-5 sa e lehtë apo e vështirë është të punosh me shokët/kolegët e tu të shkollës në distancë (per ndonjë projekt apo punë në grup)?
1 - Shumë lehtë; 5- Aspak e lehte

 - Nëse mësimi në distancë është akoma i disponueshëm, a do të dëshironi të ndiqni klasa online/në distancë edhe kur universitetet të rihapen plotësisht?
 - Po
 - Jo
 - Nuk e di

 - Ju lutem përshkruani një gjë që një nga profesorët tuaj ka bërë gjatë mësimit online/në distancë që ju ka motivuar.
-
- Çfarë tjetër mund të bëjë universiteti/profesorët tuaj për t'ju ndihmuar ose mbështetur me mësimin online / në distancë gjatë krizës COVID-19?
-

- Ju lutem mos ngurroni të jepni përshtypjet / sugjerimet / çështjet tuaja të përvojës suaj të mësimet online/në distance
-

English Version

The purpose of this research is to inform about the experiences of higher education students with online / distance learning during the last two semesters. This questionnaire aims to learn about your experiences as a student during the COVID-19 pandemic period, more specifically about the transition from learning to school facilities to distance learning. The data collected will then serve to analyze the challenges and opportunities presented by online education in Kosovo. The questionnaire is anonymous, so please be honest in your answers. Your information and responses remain confidential and will not be disclosed to any party.

This data will be used only for this study which is a thesis on the topic by me, Fiona Shahini, student of RIT Kosovo (A.U.K)

- What are some positive aspects to your distance learning experience? (Choose up to 3 options)
 - I have learned how to manage my schedule
 - I am more relaxed and less stressed
 - I work at my own pace - I have more flexibility
 - Save more time and money
 - I develop my skills in IT
 - I have fewer distractions
- What were some of the challenges you faced with online / distance education, if any? (Choose up to 5 options)
 - Problems with Internet / WIFI or technological devices (laptop, computer)
 - Difficulty accessing online learning tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, etc.
 - Lack of quiet environment in the house
 - Lack of your desk and room
 - Lack of electronic devices such as microphone, printer, headphones
 - Reducing the quality of lectures
 - Lack of digital form of course materials (Books, articles, etc.)
 - Difficulty participating / engaging in a virtual classroom
 - Difficult to concentrate and understand the content of the lecture

- Lack of motivation to learn
 - Lack of social interactions with classmates
 - Problems with online testing (written or oral)
 - Difficulty completing practical courses
 - Difficulties with teaching natural sciences (Eg: Statistics)
 - I have not encountered any challenge
 - Other (specify)
- From 1-5 how challenging did you find the assigned job during distance learning?
- 1- Very easy; 5- Very challenging
- Are you studying as much as you were before the COVID-19 crisis?
- yes
 - Somewhat
 - No, specify the percentage difference ____% (less)
- From 1-5, how effective has your University been in providing you with resources / tools for home learning?
- 1- Not effective at all; 5- Extremely effective
- How well could you manage your time while learning at a distance?
- 1- Not well at all; 5- Extremely well
- From 1-5 how easy or difficult is it to work with your schoolmates / colleagues at a distance (for a project or group work)?
- 1 - Very easy; 5 – not easy at all
- If distance learning is still available, would you like to take online / distance classes even when universities are fully reopened?
- yes
 - not
 - I do not know
- Please describe something that one of your professors did during the online / distance learning that motivated you.
-
- What else can your university / professors do to help or support you with your online / distance learning during the COVID-19 crisis
-

- Please feel free to give your feedback / suggestions / issues of your online / distance learning experience
-

Appendix 3: Consent Forms

Semi – Structured Interview Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research RIT Kosovo

Title of Project: *Online and Remote Education: Challenges and Opportunities in a Post-Pandemic World. Case of Kosovo*

Principal Investigator: Fiona Shahini, RITK Student
Dr. Shpëtim Robaj,
Prishtinë 10000
044-584-858; fionas@auk.org

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to explore the shift of higher education institution (around the world and in Kosovo more specifically) to distance learning by uncovering the challenges faced and the opportunities that can be taken advantage in a post pandemic world.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to answer **7 questions**.
3. **Duration:** It will take about 20'-30' minutes to complete the interview.
4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be used only for gaining further knowledge into the transition of education institutions in

Kosovo and other Balkan countries to distance learning. The data from the interview will be used only as part of the research techniques course.

5. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Focus Group Discussion Consent Form

Focus Group Consent Form

Title of Project: *Online and Remote Education: Challenges and Opportunities in a Post-Pandemic World. Case of Kosovo*

Principal Investigator: Fiona Shahini, RITK Student
Dr. Shpëtim Robaj,
Prishtinë 10000
044-584-858; fionas@auk.org

Purpose of the Study: You have been invited to participate in a focus group discussion about the “Challenges and Opportunities of Distance Learning in a Post-Pandemic World” conducted by Fiona Shahini, a RITK Student. The information learned in this focus group will be used only for gaining further knowledge into the transition to distance learning for students in Kosovo. The experience, impressions and suggestions provided by participants will be used to further uncover the challenges and opportunities distance learning brings for the future of Kosovo’s education sector.

Procedures to be followed: The focus group will consist of 6 students from different fields of study and different universities. The researcher will ask several questions to facilitate the discussion and will use a combination of audio-recording and note – taking to collect information. No risks are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation.

Statement of Confidentiality: Your responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in the final report. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to respect the privacy of other focus group participants by not disclosing any content discussed during the study.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to focus group questions. The aim of this discussion is to hear the many varying viewpoints. Out of respect, please refrain from interrupting others. However, feel free to be honest even when your responses counter those of other participants.

Voluntary Participation: You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group, and you may stop at any time during the course of the study.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

1. You have witnessed the drastic shift the education sector has experienced since March 2020, when education institutions were obliged to move to distance learning. What was your first reaction (concern or aspects you were looking forward to) with this transition?
2. Where do you believe lay the main challenges for Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo in terms of distance education? Do you believe that distance learning can fully substitute in-person/classroom learning? If yes why? If no, please specify what are the key challenges preventing e-learning success?
3. What are the benefits students and professors can experience and must be aware of with distance learning (so that they are more welcoming of this method of education in a post – pandemic world)?
4. Where do you believe lies greater resistance for distance learning and how can that be solved?
5. Do experiences with distance learning differ among universities (public and private) and different fields (Natural Sciences and Social Sciences)? If yes please elaborate those differences.
6. Do you believe there will be an organic demand for distance learning in the future? In your opinion, when the universities are fully reopened, will online / distance learning remain part of your university's practice in Kosovo for example?
7. What advice would you give to someone just starting out on this?

Appendix 5: Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. With a few words how would you describe your experience with shifting to distance learning?
2. Do you perceive online learning as more difficult/ challenging than traditional in-class learning?
3. Why do students face difficulties concentrating in online classes?
4. Survey results have shown that many students lack motive when learning remotely, why is that?- Is this circumstantial and related to the stress of living through a pandemic? Or is this cultural? Or is this generational? Related to outdated pedagogy? Psycho-social? Or Professor's inexperience with technology and innovative approaches to teaching?
5. Only 6% of students (survey participants) have had one – to – one communication with professors for consultations? Why is one – to – one communication not as utilized by students in Kosovo? Is this true only for distance learning or for traditional in – person learning as well?
6. What would improve your experience with distance learning?